



QUALIFIED FOR LIFE

**An education improvement plan
for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales**

Education changes lives, it provides opportunity, it enables individuals to shape their futures, it builds stronger, more tolerant and cohesive societies, it is the foundation of a strong economy. In short, education matters.



**Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government**

QUALIFIED FOR LIFE

AUDIENCE

The entire teaching workforce and government and national partners, including regional consortia, local authorities, governing bodies, workforce unions and diocesan authorities.

OVERVIEW

This document sets out the strategic objectives for education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales to 2020.

ACTION REQUIRED

None – for information only.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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ADDITIONAL COPIES

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at:

www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Improving schools (Welsh Government, 2012); *Qualified for life timeline 2014–15* (Welsh Government, 2014).



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MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



As Minister for Education and Skills I have the privilege of visiting schools and colleges the length and breadth of Wales. I have talked to scores of headteachers and principals, hundreds of teachers, lecturers and support staff, learners, parents and carers. I have seen many examples of excellence in our schools and colleges; learners having their lives transformed by the innovative work of skilled and motivated professionals. To see the energy, the enthusiasm and the expertise we have in our system, has, on occasion, been quite breathtaking.

It makes me feel all the more passionate, all the more driven to ensure that every learner in every community of Wales should have access to this experience.

We owe it to our children and young people to be honest and to be brave; excellence is not widespread, nor is practice consistently good, but it must be. *Qualified for life* is the Welsh Government's plan for ensuring that all learners benefit from excellent teaching and learning.

The *Improving schools* plan, published in 2012, set out our reform journey to 2015. As we approach that milestone, the time is right to reaffirm our commitment to raising standards and set out the next stage of our improvement journey. Strengthening literacy and numeracy and breaking the link between disadvantage and educational attainment remain our priorities.

Since 2012 we have achieved a great deal, for example we have introduced the Masters in Educational Practice (MEP), introduced the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) and the National Reading and Numeracy Tests and strengthened curriculum requirements in English, Welsh and mathematics. We have reformed regional school improvement services, reformed

professional standards for leadership and begun a major overhaul of our qualifications system for 14 to 19-year-olds.

The PISA results in 2013 are a stark reminder, however, that we cannot be complacent and there is still some way to go to ensure that our reforms impact on outcomes for our learners. So *Qualified for life* sets out our reform programme to 2020. Our reforms are set against a challenging financial backdrop with funding likely to reduce further in the coming years. To support school and college leaders we will continue to free up resources for the front line and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy wherever and whenever we can.

Qualified for life sets out our vision that learners in Wales will enjoy teaching and learning that inspires them to succeed, in an education community that works cooperatively and aspires to be great, where the potential of every child and young person is actively developed.

To achieve this vision we have a simple aim that every child and young person should benefit from excellent teaching and learning.





To deliver this aim we are setting out four strategic objectives.

- ▶ An excellent professional workforce with strong pedagogy based on an understanding of what works.
- ▶ A curriculum which is engaging and attractive to children and young people and which develops within them an independent ability to apply knowledge and skills.
- ▶ The qualifications young people achieve are nationally and internationally respected and act as a credible passport to their future learning and employment.
- ▶ Leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system, providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools.

Qualified for life identifies the key activities that will help us deliver our strategic objectives and realise our vision.

Delivering for our children and young people requires more than a list of actions. We have a collective responsibility to our children and young people, to their education and to their futures. Together, I want us to commit to developing Welsh education to be the very best it can be: to be among the best in the world. I want our vision to be underpinned by a system of self-improving schools and collaborative professionals driven by a shared moral purpose that aspires to ever higher standards.

Together we can ensure that we do the best for every child and young person, regardless of their background.

Huw Lewis AM
Minister for Education and Skills

THE VISION

Education changes lives, it provides opportunity, it enables individuals to shape their futures, it builds stronger, more tolerant and cohesive societies, it is the foundation of a strong economy. In short, education matters. Our vision for the future of education in Wales is that:

Learners in Wales will enjoy teaching and learning that inspires them to succeed, in an education community that works cooperatively and aspires to be great, where the potential of every child and young person is actively developed.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

An excellent professional workforce with strong pedagogy based on an understanding of what works.

AIM

Every child and young person to benefit from excellent teaching and learning.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

A curriculum which is engaging and attractive to children and young people and which develops within them an independent ability to apply knowledge and skills.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

The qualifications young people achieve are nationally and internationally respected and act as a credible passport to their future learning and employment.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

Leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system, providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools.





IMPROVING EDUCATION THE WELSH WAY

We are a small country and we are stronger when working together. We know we have examples of great practice in our schools and colleges; we also know that there is too much variability in the quality of education that our learners receive. We must share the excellence that exists in our schools and colleges for the benefit of all.

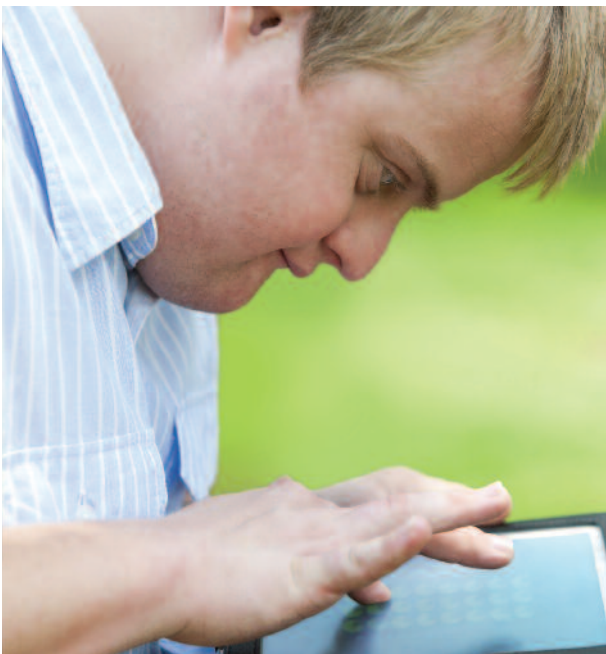
Wales has a long history and tradition of valuing education that we can build on. Our vision captures six key principles and values that will guide us in our approach.

- ▶ **Confidence and pride in Wales as a bilingual nation with the strength and assurance to nurture both languages.** We should be strong in our national identity, our skills and our place in the world, with an awareness of where we have come from, our ability to preserve what is good and to challenge what needs to be changed.
 - ▶ **Learners are at the heart of all we do.** We have high aspirations for their achievements and well-being: a child or young person's background must never limit their achievements. To put the learner at the centre of our education system we must have relevant, challenging and valued learning, delivered by inspiring teachers, lecturers and support staff who in turn will create inspired learners.
 - ▶ **Every child and young person benefits from personalised learning.** Valuing diversity and inclusivity means all children and young people should benefit from learning that meets their needs, encourages them to widen their horizons and extends their aspirations and ambitions.
 - ▶ **The success of our education system depends upon the success of all children. Collective responsibility, supported by cooperative values of partnership, trust, mutual respect and support underpin how we work together.** These values underpin collaborative working between support staff, between teachers, between school leaders, between schools, colleges and other learning centres, between local authorities and regional consortia, with the workforce unions across agencies and between Welsh Government and the entire education system.
 - ▶ **Developing the capacity for a self-improving system.** Our pursuit of greatness is based on a relentless drive for higher standards, rigour and challenge, learning from the best, locally, nationally and internationally and striving for continual improvement in all schools and colleges.
 - ▶ **Celebrate success, recognise excellence and share both.**
- If we work together to achieve this vision it will mean that our children and young people will have the best chance possible to acquire the skills to read, write, calculate, think, imagine, create, communicate and collaborate. The impact of poverty on educational outcomes will be reduced and public confidence in education will be high.

A BETTER WALES

A successful education system means a successful Wales. Achieving our vision for education will make a major contribution to the Government's ambitions for Wales, ensuring:

- ▶ an economy that is confident, outward-looking and balanced, with exports and inward investment generating wealth and a thriving private sector providing stable, high-quality jobs and careers
- ▶ support for children, families and more deprived communities so that everyone has an equal opportunity to get on and do well in life
- ▶ our citizens are healthier, happier and able to maximise their contribution to society and the economy.



In particular we believe that a successful education system will directly contribute to:

- ▶ a stronger economy
- ▶ greater innovation
- ▶ improved productivity
- ▶ more high-value businesses with more highly skilled jobs
- ▶ more research, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics
- ▶ ensuring the Welsh language thrives
- ▶ greater community cohesion and a strong sense of active citizenship
- ▶ the social and cultural capital of the nation
- ▶ greater creativity
- ▶ greater care for the vulnerable
- ▶ a more equitable and successful society.





THE IMPROVEMENT CHALLENGE

Our vision is clear, we know where we want to be and the education system we need to create. How we achieve this, to a large extent, depends on our starting point. We must understand our strengths while also acknowledging our weaknesses. We must build on what is good or great in our education system and we must tackle head-on the weaknesses that hold us back.

The recent OECD review of education in Wales, which we commissioned, highlighted a number of strengths in the Welsh school system, while also identifying a number of challenges.

Other reports, such as that by Robert Hill, have drawn similar conclusions. Robert Hill's report also makes the point that we are a fair system moving to good, with examples of great practice in many schools.

STRENGTHS

Wales has a comprehensive education system which emphasises equity and inclusion.

Our schools provide positive learning environments with good student–teacher relations. This is fundamental to creating the conditions for learning.

We have a wealth of assessment and evaluation data to help us improve policy and practice.

There is strong support for change and a commitment to improvement right across the system.

CHALLENGES

Schools are not always able to address all students' learning needs.

The conditions for nurturing teaching staff, support staff and school leadership need development.

There is a need to create greater coherence between evaluation and assessment arrangements for learners.

The quick pace of reform is a concern for some and there is a need for a longer-term vision, particularly in the context of the curriculum.

These conclusions are also largely supported by the report of our Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales who highlights that we need to:

- ▶ reduce the variability in standards between classes within schools and between schools
- ▶ continue to improve our support for literacy and numeracy
- ▶ improve learners' problem-solving and thinking skills
- ▶ reduce the impact of poverty on learner outcomes
- ▶ improve our support for leadership throughout the education system.

Our 2012 PISA results tell us we are not performing well and our challenge is to raise performance at all levels.

Across the three domains of reading, mathematics and science our children do not perform on a par with those in other countries – this is true at all ability levels.

Most 16 to 19-year-old learners in Wales, whether in school, college or the workplace, complete their chosen courses successfully, whether these are GCSEs, A levels, Welsh Baccalaureate or vocational qualifications or apprenticeship frameworks. They benefit on these courses from well-equipped schools and colleges and motivated teaching staff.

However, too few of these young people achieve the high standards expected by the most selective universities and the most innovative companies. There are also signs that the range of courses on offer and the combinations chosen by students are not always those that will prepare them most effectively for the jobs and careers of the future.





OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND COMMITMENTS FOR ACTION

To deliver our vision we need to be clear about the actions that we will take in the years ahead building on the strong foundations provided by the reforms that have been implemented to date and the improvements that have already been made. At the same time we must be bold and honest in facing up to and tackling the areas that need to improve.

In the classrooms of the best teachers, students learn at three times the rate they do in the classrooms of low-performing teachers.¹

Evidence shows that family characteristics and the home learning environment are a significant factor in determining children and young people's attainment. Most schools and colleges know that working with parents/carers, employers and their communities is an important part of what they do to support their learners to achieve their potential. Parents/carers, the community, employers and the voluntary sector have a shared responsibility to support our children and young people to achieve. Schools and colleges, though, are in a unique position to transform life chances.

Our plan for improving education is based on evidence of what works. It is essential that we are evidence-based, both as policy makers and as practitioners. We know that resources are tight; in future years there will be further pressure on budgets and this places a premium on knowing and implementing what works.

The evidence on school improvement is clear: it is the quality of teaching that matters above all other factors.

OUR AIM

Every child and young person to benefit from excellent teaching and learning.

To achieve this aim we have four strategic objectives that will drive everything we do. Underpinning these strategic objectives and integral to each of them, improving literacy

and numeracy and breaking the link between disadvantage and educational attainment remain our priorities.

¹ *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top*, McKinsey et al 2007

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

An excellent professional workforce with strong pedagogy based on an understanding of what works.

Excellent teaching and learning comes from motivated, committed, excellent practitioners, who are highly skilled, who combine expert subject knowledge with a deep understanding of the learning process and who continually seek to improve their skills.

Getting the right people into the profession is essential. We have already taken steps to make teaching a more attractive option for the brightest and best to enter the profession. In line with this we have increased the entry requirements to initial teacher training (ITT), we have strengthened the Practising Teacher Standards (PTS) and introduced the Teach First Programme into Wales.

However, concerns about the effectiveness of ITT remain. Recent inspection findings give cause for concern and headteachers often report that newly qualified teachers lack the necessary preparation for teaching. Ongoing reform of ITT is a priority action area for Welsh Government.

There are nearly 25,000 teachers in our schools in Wales and each year more than 1,700 students enter ITT. Getting the entry standards right is essential, but we will not achieve excellent teaching unless we focus on the ongoing professional development of the workforce.

The best professional development is based on reflective practice and learning from others; practitioners are more likely to develop their own classroom practice through observing others, being observed

and having the opportunity to see different approaches to learning and teaching in practice.

The best practitioners use evidence-based approaches, scrutinise and analyse data. Teaching and learning is informed by learner performance data and validated research.

We have more to do to create a culture of continuous improvement across the entire workforce. The implementation of the new professional learning model that underpins the New Deal for the workforce will see practitioners have wider access to high-quality development activities to support their practice. As well as the development of the Masters programme, consortia will ensure that there is consistent provision to support developing and outstanding teachers to improve their classroom practice, and that there is appropriate provision for middle leaders.

The New Deal also requires the profession to take greater ownership and responsibility for their own ongoing professional development, and has at its core a belief that teachers and learning support staff have a responsibility to learn from one another and share their professional practice.

Teaching is such a complex craft that one lifetime is not enough to master it, but by rigorously focusing on practice, teachers can continue to improve throughout their career.²

² Dylan Wiliam: 'Teacher quality: how to get more of it' (Spectator 'Schools Revolution' conference, March 2010).



To make sure that there are sufficient numbers of practitioners with high-quality Welsh language skills and competence in Welsh-medium and bilingual teaching methodologies, we have expanded the Sabbatical Scheme to deliver courses at three levels across Wales until 2017. We will also continue to provide funding to regional consortia to undertake activities that support the implementation of their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.



Effective teachers understand the pedagogical methods that have greatest impact in particular circumstances. They use an array of teaching strategies because there is no single, universal approach that suits all situations. Different strategies used in different combinations with different groupings of learners will improve learning outcomes. Some strategies are better-suited to teaching certain skills and fields of knowledge than others. Some strategies are better-suited to certain student backgrounds and abilities. The OECD report recognised that this is an area of weakness in Wales: not enough attention is paid to the different learning and teaching strategies required to meet the needs of **all** learners.

Learners from deprived backgrounds need to benefit from the highest-quality teaching and learning. Evidence shows that learners from deprived backgrounds may be less likely to experience good-quality teaching, but to buck the trend, they need more of it. Successful schools have active and effective leadership and deploy support staff effectively.

We need a step change in our approach to personalised learning. One of the strengths of our special schools is their ability to tailor learning to learners' needs and mainstream provision could learn much from their approaches. Greater personalisation also requires better use of assessment to inform learning. Assessment for learning practices are not well-embedded in all schools. It also means a greater understanding of the importance of thinking skills and metacognition and helping learners to learn to learn and to solve problems. Michael Barber describes the role of the teacher as increasingly becoming that of 'activator'; in addition to imparting knowledge, teachers have to motivate learners and provide them with the skills and abilities to learn.

Our proposals for additional learning needs (ALN) reform include the introduction of Individual Development Plans (IDPs); these plans, if used well, provide the opportunity for schools to develop a more learner-centred, personalised approach to learning and will require greater multi-agency cooperation. IDPs will be a statutory requirement for learners with ALN, but there is no reason why the principles of the approach should not be applied to all learners.

Digital learning provides enormous opportunities for more personalised learning. We are investing in the digital learning environments of the future and providing a support programme for schools and teachers to help them make best use of digital technologies. We have yet to exploit the potential of digital technologies to their full extent.

IN SUMMARY: OUR ACTIONS

WE HAVE

- ▶ Strengthened the requirements for entry into the teaching profession, including the introduction of new and consistent induction arrangements for NQTs.
- ▶ Developed the ground-breaking MEP programme to support professional development in the early years of teaching.
- ▶ Invested in Learning Wales, Hwb+ and professional learning communities (PLCs) as a mechanism for sharing best practice and promoting the use of evidence-based approaches to teaching and learning.
- ▶ Begun to develop a culture of and build the capacity for sharing professional expertise and excellent practice including effective use of observation.
- ▶ Provided tools to support assessment for learning as an aid to greater personalisation of learning.
- ▶ Invested in the Sabbatical Scheme and the Welsh in Education Grant as a mechanism for ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of practitioners with high-quality Welsh language skills and competence in Welsh-medium and bilingual teaching methodologies.
- ▶ Supported action research into effective teaching and learning in further education colleges.
- ▶ Introduced a national model of professional learning – the New Deal for the workforce.
- ▶ Introduced a national model of coaching and mentoring.
- ▶ Published a Support Staff Action Plan to address the development needs of this growing sector of the workforce.
- ▶ Brought in regulations to establish a new Education Workforce Council to replace the current GTCW that will register a much wider group of practitioners.
- ▶ Developed the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) as an assessment for learning tool.
- ▶ Provided diagnostic tools to assist in interpreting the results of the reading and numeracy tests to inform approaches to teaching and learning.





WE WILL

- ▶ Implement the actions set out in *Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools* to address the link between deprivation and educational attainment.
- ▶ Implement the new model of professional learning – the New Deal for the workforce.
- ▶ Support professionals to develop their approaches to embedding thinking skills and metacognition into their classroom practice.
- ▶ Continue to support the effective use of digital technologies to develop approaches to more personalised learning.
- ▶ Ensure that there are sufficient numbers of practitioners with high-quality Welsh language skills and competence in Welsh-medium and bilingual teaching methodologies.
- ▶ Review the qualifications framework for learning support staff.
- ▶ Improve the capacity of the workforce, working in collaboration with health, social care and communities, to better meet the learning needs of children and young people with SEN.
- ▶ Build improved capacity among professionals to integrate assessment for learning approaches into their classroom practice.
- ▶ Reform ITT so that new teachers entering the profession are the best qualified and best trained.
- ▶ Introduce regulations to require all schools to set out in a school development plan how they intend to develop their staff in relation to their identified school improvement priorities and targets.
- ▶ Work with consortia to support the development of outstanding classroom teachers and middle leaders.
- ▶ Develop access to Masters programmes for other practitioners and career points.
- ▶ Develop the role of the new Education Workforce Council so that it supports a high-status profession.
- ▶ Ensure the framework of professional standards remains fit for purpose.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

A curriculum which is engaging and attractive to children and young people and which develops within them an independent ability to apply knowledge and skills.

We want our curriculum to embody high expectations so that students are challenged and supported to develop deep levels of thinking and are able to apply their knowledge to solve problems and think creatively. We want a curriculum that promotes substantive discussion of ideas, with clear assessment criteria to enable frequent and constructive feedback to learners, and which is aligned to teaching strategies that support the curriculum goals, engage students and exploit available technology.



We have made a good start. The Foundation Phase is a child development-focused, age-appropriate curriculum that in line with international evidence and best practice emphasises experiential, active learning to promote learner engagement and enjoyment while fostering inquisitiveness. Evaluation evidence is positive, the Foundation Phase is the right approach, but we need to embed the philosophy and practice of the Foundation Phase as it is not yet secure. There are too many schools that either pay lip service to the Foundation Phase or have not implemented it as intended. We will put in place a 10-year plan to ensure that early years practice is in line with the Foundation Phase in all schools and settings and we will introduce a new baseline assessment in September 2015.

If children and young people are not secure in the basics of literacy and numeracy they cannot access the breadth of the curriculum and the wealth of opportunities and choices it offers. We have begun to strengthen the basics through the introduction of the LNF, and the National Reading and Numeracy Tests. We are also taking steps to further strengthen the teaching of English, Welsh and mathematics with revised programmes of study.

These building blocks are fundamental. They allow us to extend our ambitions for the curriculum. Higher education and employers are increasingly looking for young people who can think, who can solve problems and who are creative and curious, skills that are reflected in the new revised Welsh Baccalaureate.

The OECD have highlighted that assessment is an area that needs improving and we must address this. Assessment for learning practice is not well-embedded and we know from the Sutton Trust Toolkit that research shows that one of the most effective (and lowest-cost) strategies for improving the attainment of our more deprived learners is high-quality feedback. This can only happen if there are strong assessment for learning practices in our schools.





Professor Graham Donaldson has been commissioned to develop a new curriculum and assessment arrangements for Wales. This new curriculum will provide our children and young people with opportunities for learning that will support them in being able to think, do, prosper, and adapt.

Professor Donaldson has been asked to articulate a clear, coherent vision for the national curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales from Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4, linking directly to our new qualifications system. The review will be working very closely with a wide range of stakeholders from across Wales and beyond. Professor Donaldson will also be considering the important recommendations already made in the reports from a number of independent task and finish groups.

The curriculum that is taught in schools and colleges is an essential component in determining the knowledge, skills and aptitudes that young people develop. Schools and colleges, through their individual ethos and the pastoral learner support services they provide help young people develop their aspirations, positive behaviours and values. However, they do not do this in isolation.

The resilience and capacity of young people to engage and successfully progress is also supported by the community, voluntary sector, employers and other agencies such as Careers Wales. We have recognised the need to identify and support those most at risk of disengaging and implemented the *Youth engagement and progression framework* (and the supporting *National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014–2018*).



IN SUMMARY: OUR ACTIONS

WE HAVE

- ▶ Introduced the Foundation Phase and supported its roll out across Wales.
- ▶ Introduced the LNF and through the NSP are providing schools with advice, guidance and materials to ensure that literacy and numeracy are embedded across the curriculum.
- ▶ Consulted on new Areas of Learning for Language, Literacy and Communication Skills and Mathematical Development and programmes of study for English, Welsh and mathematics to ensure alignment with the expectations of the LNF.
- ▶ Introduced the National Reading and Numeracy Tests.
- ▶ Introduced Learning Programmes for 16 to 19-year-olds which provide greater focus on courses which employers and universities value and which offer industry-relevant curriculum and work experience.
- ▶ Introduced the *Youth engagement and progression framework* to identify and provide support to those at risk of disengaging.
- ▶ Established Careers Wales as a national, independent provider of careers information, advice and guidance.

WE WILL

- ▶ Refresh and update the National Literacy and National Numeracy Programmes that were published in 2012.
- ▶ Provide further support to embed the Foundation Phase.
- ▶ Strengthen arrangements for the moderation of teacher assessments to improve reliability and build confidence in the judgements reached.
- ▶ Introduce a new Foundation Phase baseline assessment, as part of a broader early assessment framework, in September 2015 to support assessment for learning and allow schools to monitor learners' progress more effectively.
- ▶ Consider the recommendations of Professor Graham Donaldson's independent review in taking forward a new curriculum and assessment arrangements for Wales.
- ▶ Introduce and provide support to implement the new Areas of Learning for Language, Literacy and Communication Skills and Mathematical Development and programmes of study for English, Welsh and mathematics.
- ▶ Introduce a Youth Guarantee, ensuring all young people receive an appropriate offer of post-16 provision.
- ▶ Direct Careers Wales to support the development of stronger and more sustainable partnerships between schools, colleges and employers.





STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

The qualifications young people achieve are nationally and internationally respected and act as a credible passport to their future learning and employment.

We want our learners to be confident in applying the knowledge acquired in the classroom to real-life problems and to be able to apply what they have learned in unfamiliar settings, both inside, and outside of school and college. It is not enough for our children and young people to be well qualified, they must be well educated too, so our qualifications must recognise and reward the skills and knowledge that are essential for life.

The Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales set out the need for Wales to develop its own qualification system to meet the needs of our learners and employers. We want qualifications in Wales to be valued, respected and credible; we want them to offer our young people a passport to their future. During the Review of Qualifications, employers and higher education institutions (HEIs) voiced strong support for GCSEs, A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate. They also identified the need for improvements; the review heard time and again concerns that learners with good GCSEs in English or Welsh Language and Mathematics demonstrated poor literacy and numeracy skills. Consequently our GCSEs are being redesigned to reflect the recommendations of the review and in line with PISA skills. These changes also reflect those already in train through the introduction of the LNF and changes to the English, Welsh and mathematics programmes of study. New A levels will also be introduced, with the AS/A2 structure that universities say they value retained.

At the heart of our qualification system we are reforming and revising the Welsh Baccalaureate. The new Welsh Baccalaureate will capture the knowledge and skills that employers and higher education want, while at the same time reflecting the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum. The new Welsh Baccalaureate is based on rigorous academic and vocational qualifications alongside an individual project and three challenges that enable young people to develop critical skills including problem

solving and creativity. Our new GCSEs and Welsh Baccalaureate reflect our aspirations for the curriculum, so that we teach and test the skills that are regarded internationally as fundamental to success in further study and employment.

The new qualifications system that we are developing will be underpinned by Qualifications Wales, a new independent body with responsibility for the integrity of our qualifications system and maintaining confidence in our qualifications. Qualifications Wales will be the new regulator for qualifications in Wales and in time will take on the awarding of Wales-only qualifications.

Alongside reforms to general qualifications we are strengthening the vocational gateway with the introduction of Sector Qualifications Advisory Panels (SQAPs) to ensure that only those vocational qualifications which are valued by employers in the sector are accredited for use in Wales.

Learning programmes have been introduced to guide the choices young people make about the courses they will study between the ages of 16 and 19. They equip young people with the combination of learning that gives them the skills, knowledge and qualifications they will need in the future.

The number of apprenticeships available to young people has increased since 2012 while the quality of the frameworks which specify what will be learned by young people engaged on these workplace-based courses has also improved.

IN SUMMARY: OUR ACTIONS

WE HAVE

- ▶ Commissioned an Independent Review of Qualifications and subsequently accepted all 42 recommendations.
- ▶ Worked with stakeholders, including WJEC, to develop subject principles for new 2015 Wales-only GCSEs in English Language, Welsh Language, Mathematics and Mathematics – Numeracy.
- ▶ Published details of the GCSEs to be revised for first teaching from 2016.
- ▶ Published a list of AS qualifications and A levels to be revised for first teaching from 2016.
- ▶ Introduced grading of the Welsh Baccalaureate at Advanced Level.
- ▶ Worked with stakeholders to develop revised Welsh Baccalaureate and published design principles on the Qualifications Wales website.
- ▶ Revised secondary school performance measures which will take effect in 2017 and 2018, to reflect the new qualifications being introduced.
- ▶ Established SQAPs in the social care and construction sectors.
- ▶ Published design principles for the revised Essential Skills Wales on the Qualification Wales website.
- ▶ Categorised all vocational qualifications as IVET (Initial Vocational Education and Training) or CVET (Continuing Vocational Education and Training) to determine their appropriateness for teaching pre-16.

WE WILL

- ▶ Implement the Review of Qualifications recommendations.
- ▶ Introduce new GCSEs in English Language, Welsh Language, Mathematics and Mathematics – Numeracy and revised GCSEs in English Literature and Welsh Literature for first teaching from September 2015.
- ▶ Work with WJEC to make available to centres by autumn 2015 specifications and Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs) for the revised GCSEs for first teaching from September 2016.
- ▶ Working in partnership with WJEC, regional consortia, the NSP and ColegauCymru to implement in autumn 2014 a support programme for schools and colleges to help them implement the changes to GCSEs and the new pedagogy that will be required.
- ▶ Introduce the new revised and more rigorous Welsh Baccalaureate for first teaching from September 2015, including grading at all levels.





- ▶ Introduce revised AS and A levels for first teaching from September 2015, with specifications available to centres in autumn 2014.
- ▶ Implement new criteria for vocational qualifications to ensure they are fit for purpose and establish further Sector Qualifications Advisory Panels (SQAPs) in other vocational sectors.
- ▶ Establish Qualifications Wales as a strong independent body with responsibility for the qualifications system in Wales with full regulatory powers and in-time awarding functions.
- ▶ Introduce new Essential Skills Wales qualifications for first teaching from September 2015.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

Leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system, providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools.

Great schools and colleges have great leaders, both at senior and middle management levels. International research indicates that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on learners' outcomes. School and college leaders determine the quality of teaching through the decisions and actions that they take.

- ▶ Leaders determine the priorities for their institution's development and improvement.
- ▶ Through the recruitment decisions they make leaders decide who to put in front of learners and students.
- ▶ Leaders determine the professional development needs of their staff and manage their performance.
- ▶ Where there is active and effective leadership schools can mitigate the impact of disadvantage.

Leadership of our schools and colleges carries great responsibility so we are determined to develop the best leaders and support them in all they do. We have revised the leadership standards, created the National Leadership Development Board, strengthened the National Professional Qualification for Headship and revised

capability procedures to give school leaders the tools they need to ensure excellent teaching is the norm in their schools. We have also begun work on a leadership programme for senior college leaders. We will also be developing leadership modules as part of the future Masters programme and ensuring that there is appropriate provision of middle leadership programmes to develop the next generation of school and college leaders.

The success of the education system in Wales depends upon the success of all children; ensuring every child and young person benefits from excellent teaching and learning is a collective responsibility. It requires collaboration and partnership. The National Model for regional working in Wales is an approach to school improvement based on school-to-school support, founded on a partnership ethos with the aim of creating a self-improving system.

The key features of our self-improving system include:

- ▶ schools and colleges as communities where collaborative inquiry is used to foster improvements in practice
- ▶ groupings of schools and colleges that engage in joint practice development
- ▶ more intensive partnerships being organised where necessary to provide support for schools or colleges facing challenges
- ▶ families, businesses and community organisations supporting the work of schools and colleges
- ▶ coordination of the system provided by school and college leaders.

The National Model is transforming school improvement from being something that was once 'done to' schools to something that is being 'done by' schools. It signals an end to the top-down improvement 'service' being delivered to schools and instead seeks to empower school leaders to work together, taking control of their futures and their development.

The role of regional consortia in the National Model is to deliver intervention, and challenge. This challenge is essential to ensure that schools set ambitious and stretching targets for improved learner attainment. Their role is also to broker support strategies that improve teaching and learning, ensuring that partnership working and collaboration leads to higher standards and increased rigour.

The role of LAs in the National Model is clear – as the democratically accountable body they are crucial as the conscience of the system, but the National Model is also clear about their role as commissioners not providers.

LAs also have a critical role in delivering an educational infrastructure that is fit for purpose – that it is in the right place, the right size and the right condition to enable the effective delivery of education.

We will continue to work with them to deliver the 21st Century Schools Programme and school reorganisation.

More and more parents and carers are choosing Welsh-medium education for their children at all phases. The growth in the number of Welsh-medium schools is one of our greatest successes and local authorities have a duty to improve the planning and provision of Welsh-medium education in response to parental demand. The Welsh-medium sector also has an enviable track record in collaborative working and making a success of school-to-school support. There is much that the rest of the sector can learn in disseminating best practice.

Schools Challenge Cymru offers us the opportunity to make significant progress in the attainment of learners in schools that face some of the most challenging contexts. It is based upon a fast-track, accelerated approach to the National Model – a bespoke programme of support brokered by Schools Challenge Cymru advisers and based on school-to-school support as the main driver for improvement.

Colleges are part of the self-improving system, and greater cooperation between schools and colleges is in the interests of learner choice and better progression. This can have many benefits, not least that schools, colleges and indeed work-based learning providers working together to strategically plan the curriculum can increase the availability and take-up of post-16 Welsh-medium provision; more generally, because there is much the sectors can learn from one another.





IN SUMMARY: OUR ACTIONS

WE HAVE

- ▶ Strengthened the NPQH.
- ▶ Introduced leadership modules into the MEP.
- ▶ Set in place a National Leadership Development Board (NLDB).
- ▶ Demonstrated effective use of collaborative approaches to leadership at all levels to accelerate school improvement through the Lead and Emerging Practitioner (LEP) Programme, which includes tranches for both mainstream and special schools.
- ▶ Introduced the National Model for regional working.
- ▶ Introduced legislation to ensure that statutory Welsh-medium education is planned strategically and placed an expectation on colleges and work-based learning providers to plan to increase the availability and take-up of post-16 Welsh-medium provision.
- ▶ Put in place secondary school banding.
- ▶ Introduced regulations which enable local authorities to federate schools, where it is identified that this will be beneficial for the schools involved, with the overall aim of improving standards and school performance. Schools retain the powers to federate by choice.
- ▶ Revised the leadership standards for headteachers and made them accessible to all practitioners.
- ▶ Published a Leadership Development Pathway which demonstrates the development of progressive, practice-based, career-long leadership for all.
- ▶ Published a range of online leadership support materials that are quality-assured and available on Learning Wales.
- ▶ Provided funded mentoring support for new headteachers.
- ▶ Evaluated a wide range of existing leadership programmes to determine what works well.
- ▶ Introduced the 21st Century Schools Programme to rebuild and remodel schools in Wales and create modern learning environments that promote effective approaches to teaching and learning.

WE WILL

- ▶ Ensure that the principle of school-to-school support underpins Welsh Government and consortia approaches to school improvement.
- ▶ Work with the NLDB and consortia to continue to populate the Leadership Development Pathway and encourage school-to-school working.
- ▶ Improve access to Masters programmes at more career points to support more effective leadership development.
- ▶ Encourage wider practitioner engagement at all levels with the Individual Leadership Review tool to promote an active participation in a continuum of leadership development.
- ▶ Work with consortia to introduce consistent provision for middle leader development.
- ▶ Provide further leadership support materials that are quality assured.
- ▶ Introduce a number of hubs across Wales to support young people to improve attainment at the highest levels, increasing their opportunities to access places at the UK's highest-ranking universities, including Oxford and Cambridge.
- ▶ Work with the NLDB to identify how executive headship can be better supported.
- ▶ Roll out the Schools Challenge Cymru (SCC) project as a fast-track support programme for the most challenged schools in Wales, based on the principles of the National Model for regional working.
- ▶ Review the current range of secondary school banding metrics.
- ▶ Free our leaders to lead by reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, providing greater flexibility over resources with priority given to the front line. Rationalise education grants in order to provide greater flexibility particularly to those schools that are good or better.
- ▶ Review progress against the agreed priorities in regional consortia business plans via termly review and challenge meetings.
- ▶ Develop a leadership programme for senior college leaders.
- ▶ Work in partnership with ColegauCymru to develop a new code for governors in further education, which will reflect best practice.
- ▶ Produce national standards for challenge advisers.
- ▶ Introduce a national system for the categorisation of primary schools to enable regional education consortia to target intervention and support.
- ▶ Introduce a national system for the categorisation of secondary schools (based on the revised school banding metrics) to enable regional education consortia to target intervention and support.
- ▶ Review and strengthen the existing governance framework in order to make it more flexible to enable governing bodies to appoint governors with the necessary skills.





REALISING THE BENEFITS

It is essential that we are able to measure progress in achieving our vision, that we are able to identify whether or not the education system is improving, and that we are delivering for our children and young people.

Ultimately our success will be measured by the attainment of our learners relative to that of learners in other countries as measured by PISA. These are the skills for life that our children need for their success and that Wales needs to compete with other nations.

Our ambition is to achieve scores of 500 in each of reading, mathematics and science in the PISA tests 2021.

At the same time we will significantly reduce the percentage of learners achieving at or below PISA proficiency Level 2.



Along the way to this goal for 2021 we will measure our progress by:

- ▶ improvements in learners' standards of literacy and numeracy, including higher order thinking skills and the application of knowledge and skills
- ▶ reductions in the attainment gap between learners eligible for free school meals and their non-free school meals peers
- ▶ improved confidence in the education system among parents/carers, employers, further and higher education institutions.

Each year we will publish a 'Wales Education Report Card' – this will set out a range of performance indicators to evidence progress in delivering the measures set out above.

Our Report Card will also detail progress in delivering our strategic objectives and the actions set out in this plan. We will also use this Report Card to identify and set out further actions that may be required to accelerate progress.

FURTHER INFORMATION



***Qualified for life* provides the strategic context and identifies key priorities for improving education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales. It is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of all our activities to improve the life chances of learners. If you wish to find out further information on our actions to support learners you may wish to refer to the documents below.**

- ▶ To learn more about what we are doing to ensure that every child gets the best start in life you may want to read *Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan* (Welsh Government, 2013).
- ▶ For further detail on how we are seeking to tackle deprivation to ensure that no child is disadvantaged by poverty and inequality you may like to read *Rewriting the future: Raising ambition and attainment in Welsh schools* (Welsh Government, 2014).
- ▶ To read about the steps we are taking to support learners and parents/carers who choose education through the medium of Welsh please take a look at the *Welsh-medium Education Strategy* (Welsh Government, 2010).
- ▶ For more detail on the work of regional education consortia and their role in supporting school improvement you may like to read *National model for regional working* (Welsh Government, 2014).
- ▶ To learn more about the reform of qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales you may wish to visit the Qualifications Wales website at www.qualificationswales.org which provides up-to-date information on new GCSEs, A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate.
- ▶ To find out more about how we are working to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training you may like to read the *Youth engagement and progression framework* (Welsh Government, 2014). The *National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014–2018* (Welsh Government, 2014) is also relevant in this context.
- ▶ For a complete overview of education and skills in Wales this plan for 3 to 19-year-olds should be read in conjunction with the *Policy statement on skills* (Welsh Government, 2014) and the associated *Skills implementation plan* (Welsh Government, 2014) and the *Policy statement on higher education* (Welsh Government, 2013).

