

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE(4)–02–15 – Paper 4

Qualifications Wales Bill

Evidence from: Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)

What we do

1. OCR work with schools, colleges, workplaces and other institutions in the public and private sector. Over 13,000 centres choose the A Levels, GCSEs and vocational qualifications we offer, such as Cambridge Nationals, Cambridge Technicals and Cambridge Progression qualifications. There are approximately 400 active centres in Wales, representing maintained and independent schools and colleges, training providers and employers, offering a range of OCR qualifications.
2. We develop our qualifications in close consultation with teachers, industry leaders and government to ensure they are relevant for learners today and meet requirements set by Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), Dfes in Wales and CCEA (Regulators) in Northern Ireland
3. We support providers to deliver our qualifications, ensuring our customers have access to: professional training; support materials; publications; telephone contact with OCR advisors; and online access to guidance via our websites.
4. OCR recognises the Welsh Assembly's intention is to create a qualification system in Wales that is responsive to its own policies and independent from policy decisions taken by the Department for Education in England. This desire to achieve an independent examination system for Wales is wholly a matter for the Assembly and the people of Wales, but we believe there are risks of such a development for learners in Wales and, indeed, in other parts of the UK. The creation of qualifications solely for Wales will result in issues of comparability and transferability, and may potentially limit the variety and breadth of offer available.
5. The Bill will allow for Ministers and Qualifications Wales to produce a list of priority qualifications and the rationale for creating one national body to deliver the 'assessment of the main qualifications in schools' ignores the evidence of the successful operation of established awarding processes to address this issue. There is strong evidence that joint awarding body processes have successfully delivered comparable standards for many years and it is essential that there is transparency about the process that will be in place to ensure that the safety of the awarding process is a comparable standard to the rest of the UK.
6. OCR would argue that the creation of a single exam board will not inherently protect standards over time or between qualifications or address in any way the main causes of grade inflation. Indeed, we believe it would weaken rather than strengthen the capacity of the system to maintain standards.

7. OCR also believe that the creation of a single exam board in Wales risks increasing costs to the tax payer, creating new bureaucracies, and removing incentives for efficiency and innovation.
8. We welcome the decision to provide Qualifications Wales with independence from Welsh Government, and we support a separation of responsibilities between the function of developing and awarding qualifications and the regulation of this activity. As OCR has long argued for these powers to be moved from Welsh government, we are in support of this direction of travel.
9. Qualifications Wales will need to Concentrate upon the delivery of regulation and quality assurance providing the public with evidence of the ability to act as a trusted independent body with powers to ensure the required standards are delivered throughout the system and promote public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualifications system.
10. We would wish to see more attention given on how the emerging difference between GCSEs and GCEs will be managed in a way to protect the long term progression into HE of learners and the portability of qualifications within all parts of the UK and internationally.
11. The different models for GCSE and GCE that will emerge from 2015 onwards suggest that OCR has had to review the range and scope of provision offered to Welsh learners and centres and it will not be possible to deliver qualifications that meets the needs of both the Welsh and English markets in the future. This has been expressed with apparent shock from schools in Wales that are current OCR centres.
12. The loss of competition between awarding bodies will also have a direct impact on choice. The current system offers schools and teachers the ability to choose between a range of options to create a learning programme that fits with the aspirations and interests of their pupils and with the creation of a single body this inevitably will be removed.
13. Qualifications Wales will inherit a monopoly arrangement where WJEC is the single provider of high status, high volume and high risk qualifications and it will need to reassure stakeholders that robust measures will be in place to ensure the monopoly arrangements from WJEC continue to deliver innovation, responsiveness and reliability.