



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# 16 to 18 local curricula guidance

## Draft Guidance

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# 16 to 18 local curricula guidance

**Audience** This document is aimed at Medr (the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research), local authorities, the governing bodies and headteachers of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms, the governing bodies and principal or chief executive officer of any Further Education Institution (FEIs), Estyn, education unions and any other interested parties.

**Overview** This document provides statutory guidance on the development of 16 to 18 local curricula in Wales.

**Action required** Medr are required to have regard to this guidance when forming 16 to 18 local curricula offers in Wales.

**Further information** Enquiries about this document should be directed to:

16-18 Learner Pathways  
Learner Pathways Division  
Tertiary Education Directorate  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ

e-mail: [Dysgu.16-18.Learning@gov.wales](mailto:Dysgu.16-18.Learning@gov.wales)

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

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# 16 to 18 local curricula guidance

## Introduction

This guidance sets out the legal duties on the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula in Wales that will transfer from Welsh Ministers to Medr (the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research). It is intended that these duties will transfer from Welsh Ministers to Medr as of April 2026. This guidance has been developed for Medr and will serve as statutory guidance from Welsh Government to Medr on the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula in Wales. It is made under section 20 of the Tertiary Education and Research Act 2022 (the TER Act).

As statutory guidance, Medr must have regard to it when exercising functions under the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (the 2000 Act).

Throughout the guidance, we frequently use the word 'should' when referring to Welsh Government expectations. The use of 'should' refers to steps we strongly recommend Medr should take, but does not purport to set out mandatory requirements (which are highlighted separately throughout the guidance using the word 'must'). As these recommendations form part of statutory guidance, Medr must consider them, but may, with good reason decide to do something different.

This guidance applies to the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula for maintained secondary schools with sixth forms ('schools') and Further Education Institutions ('FEIs'). This will support our policy vision for successful 14 to 19 learner pathways. It does not apply to apprenticeships, as their curriculum is set by apprenticeship frameworks, nor to work-based learning.

This guidance does not contain legal advice and should not be relied upon for that purpose. Medr must obtain its own legal advice.

## Definitions

Under the 2000 Act, 'forming' a local curriculum relates to the overarching determination of a local curriculum offer and 'planning' a local curriculum means the process by which courses of study to include in the local curriculum offer are agreed. Any references to 'forming' or 'planning' throughout this guidance will be using these definitions.

Where references to 'curriculum planners' are made throughout this guidance, curriculum planners are those bodies that are responsible for assisting Medr in planning the local curriculum or curricula for a local authority's area, as laid in section 33J of the 2000 Act. These are local authorities, schools and FEIs.

Where references to a 'course' or 'courses' of study are made throughout this guidance, this refers to a course of study which leads to a qualification approved or designated by Qualifications Wales for delivery in publicly funded programmes for 16 to 18 year olds.

# 1. Vision for 16 to 18 learning

- 1.1. The transition to post-16 learning for learners is a significant one, marking both the end of compulsory schooling in Wales and the point at which they have the opportunity to specialise in their choice of courses in a school or FEI, start an apprenticeship, step into work-based learning or take part in Jobs Growth Wales+.
- 1.2. This gives learners the opportunity to pursue subjects they have chosen in greater depth – be they general or vocational qualifications – matched to their future aspirations and pathways. It also marks a shift in the curriculum from one which is ‘broad and balanced’, to one which is more flexible, tailored and diverse.
- 1.3. The opportunity for learners to specialise at 16, choosing a pathway that is designed for them and their aspirations for higher education and/or employment, is one of the strengths of 16 to 18 education in Wales. This relies on them having access to, and understanding, a broad range of options. As learners transition from the Curriculum for Wales into post-16 education, it is important that their prior learning is recognised and built upon. While the Curriculum for Wales ends at 16, post-16 curriculum should still be responsive to learners’ prior experiences, and allow for learner-centred progression.
- 1.4. From September 2027, learners starting post-compulsory education and training programmes will have followed the Curriculum for Wales up to Year 11. At the heart of Curriculum for Wales for 3 to 16 year olds are the four purposes, around which all schools’ curricula should be designed. The aim of a school’s curriculum is to support its learners to become:
  - Ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives.
  - Enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work.
  - Ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.
  - Healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.
- 1.5. These four purposes for education should not stop at 16 but should instead inform a shared vision for 16 to 18 learning and beyond in Wales, with all learners continuing to develop towards them throughout their education.
- 1.6. Underpinned by the four purposes, 16 to 18 learning – and the local curricula across Wales that constitute it – should also:
  - Make learners’ transitions smoother, both:
    - following end of compulsory schooling at 16; and
    - when progressing to tertiary education, training or employment at age 18 or 19 - with learners enabled to access their chosen next steps with confidence.
  - Be centred around the learner and their needs.
  - Support increased rates of participation, in 16 to 18 education and in higher education and apprenticeships.
  - Embed parity of esteem between general and vocational qualifications and pathways.

- Plan for and provide increased opportunities and encourage demand for participation in learning Welsh and learning through the medium of Welsh.
- Give learners the skills they need to be able to adapt throughout their lives in an ever changing economy and society.

- 1.7. Through their 16 to 18 learning, we want as many learners as possible to obtain level 3 qualifications – noting the benefits this brings for them as individuals, for society, and for the Welsh economy – while also recognising the importance of providing options for learners who need to start their 16 to 18 learning at a lower level. Ultimately, we want all learners to progress on a pathway that meets their specific needs and ambitions, enabling them to succeed and step confidently into adulthood, and recognise that all pathways have equal value.
- 1.8. The choices learners make about their 16 to 18 destinations and learning while in school, should be informed by high quality, impartial and comprehensive information on the courses and pathways available to them across all settings. Schools, FEIs, Careers Wales, and other relevant organisations can all play a role in ensuring this information is consistently delivered and easily accessible, enabling learners to make informed choices that support their aspirations and future success in 16 to 18 learning and beyond.

## **Establishment of Medr**

- 1.9. The TER Act established the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Medr). Medr is responsible for the strategic oversight, quality and funding of:
  - Further education, including FEIs and school sixth forms.
  - Higher education, including research and innovation.
  - Adult education and adult community learning.
  - Apprenticeships.
- 1.10. The establishment of Medr brings a range of strategic, practical and learner-centred benefits, with there now being a single body responsible for post-compulsory education. This guidance seeks to ensure those benefits are realised in relation to 16 to 18 learning, through the role Medr will play in forming 16 to 18 local curricula, working closely with local authorities, schools and FEIs.
- 1.11. The TER Act sets out 11 strategic duties for Medr, while also transferring the duty for the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula from Welsh Ministers to Medr (intended to transfer with effect from April 2026). These are set out in section 2 to 12 of the TER Act. The three strategic duties listed below have particular relevance for Medr's role in the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula, and are referred to throughout this guidance:
  - Encouraging participation (section 4).
  - Promoting collaboration and coherence (section 7).
  - Promoting Welsh medium study (section 9).
- 1.12. Under section 9 (2) of the TER Act, Welsh Government has formally designated Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to advise Medr on its statutory strategic duties relating to the Welsh language.

## **Purpose and aims of this guidance**

- 1.13. The TER Act amended the Learning and Skills Act 2000 so that Medr will have the responsibility to form a local curriculum for 16 to 18 year olds. This guidance sets out expectations for Medr around their duty to form local curricula. This guidance will also outline the existing duties placed on local authorities, schools and FEIs in the 2000 Act.
- 1.14. This guidance will inform Medr in its work with local authorities, schools and FEIs in planning and forming local curricula from the 2026/27 academic year onwards. The first local curricula formed with reference to this guidance will be taught to learners from September 2027.
- 1.15. We would also envisage Medr using this guidance to inform joint strategic planning and its work to increase collaboration and partnership working between providers in relation to the formation of local curricula.

## **2. Respective duties**

- 2.1. A local curriculum is the curriculum from which learners aged 16 to 18 in Wales have the right to choose their courses, and subsequently study in schools or FEIs. Local curricula offers should be made up of a range of both general and vocational courses that learners are entitled to study. Local curriculum offers will continue to be jointly planned by local authorities, schools and FEIs.
- 2.2. It is intended that from April 2026 Medr will assume the duty previously held by Welsh Ministers to form local curricula. As part of forming local curricula, Medr will have the power to determine the parameters local curricula must meet. This is likely to include the number of courses, the nature of the courses (academic and vocational), the coverage of learning domains, and the levels of courses that will be available within it.
- 2.3. This section outlines the legislative duties of Welsh Government, Medr, local authorities, schools and FEIs, following the coming into force legislative changes set out in the TER Act, in respect of the planning, formation and monitoring of 16 to 18 local curricula.

### **Welsh Government**

- 2.4. The Welsh Ministers remain under a duty to promote the education of persons in Wales (section 10 of the Education Act 1996). They are responsible for setting the broad strategic policy framework and legislation in relation to 16 to 18 learning and curricula in Wales. Under the TER Act there have been changes to specific statutory functions in this policy area and these are summarised below.
- 2.5. It is the intention that the responsibility for forming the local curricula will transfer to Medr from April 2026. However, the Welsh Ministers have the power to develop and provide guidance to Medr in relation to its duty to form local curricula (section 20 of the TER Act requires Medr to have regard to guidance provided by the Welsh Ministers when exercising its functions, including in relation to its duty to form local curricula).

- 2.6. Not all functions in relation to 16 to 18 local curricula have transferred to Medr. The Welsh Ministers have retained the power to issue guidance to local authorities, schools and FEI governing bodies in respect of the duty to 'take all reasonable steps to maximise the availability of courses in the local curriculum' (section 33K and 33L of the 2000 Act). In order to provide clarity and simplicity for local authorities, schools and FEIs, it is our intention to develop any future guidance on this subject in alignment with any guidance Medr produces on the planning of local curricula. For now, the [2014 guidance](#) remains in place.
- 2.7. Welsh Ministers retain their powers to amend, omit and add to the five learning domains set out in section 33A of the 2000 Act, which are:
  - Mathematics, science and technology.
  - Business, administration and law.
  - Services for people.
  - Arts, media, culture and languages.
  - Humanities, social sciences and preparation for life and work.

## Medr

- 2.8. Under section 33A of the 2000 Act (Formation of local curricula for students aged 16 to 18), Medr must form for the area of each local authority one or more local curricula for students who are above compulsory school age but have not attained the age of nineteen. Each local curriculum must consist of courses of study which fall within the five learning domains and are selected by Medr to form part of that local curriculum.
- 2.9. Under section 33B of the 2000 Act (Local curricula: Welsh language), Medr must exercise its functions in relation to local curricula so as to promote access to and availability of courses of study which are taught through the medium of the Welsh language.
- 2.10. Under section 33C of the 2000 Act (Areas with more than one local curriculum), where Medr forms more than one local curriculum for the area of a local authority under section 33A, Medr must designate the schools or institutions whose relevant students are to be entitled to elect under section 33E (Pupils' choices of local curriculum courses) to follow courses of study included within the curriculum.
- 2.11. Local curricula should be designed to offer a breadth of general and vocational courses. Welsh Ministers had previously set out in statutory guidance that a minimum of 30 courses, including a minimum of five general and five vocational courses should be offered through a local curriculum. As the duty of forming local curricula has now transferred to Medr, Medr should now determine these parameters. Medr should determine them with reference to the previous requirements as well as the duty on curriculum planners to maximise the number of courses. These expectations should be set out in the guidance that Medr develops for local authorities, schools and FEIs on planning local curricula.
- 2.12. Medr is required to oversee the planning of local curricula by local authorities, schools and FEIs, and monitor their delivery. It is intended that from April 2026 Medr will assume the power to produce statutory guidance to local authorities, schools and FEIs on the planning of local curricula. The guidance Medr produces will replace the

existing 2014 guidance. The 2014 guidance will remain in effect until new guidance is produced.

- 2.13. The local curriculum should be formed in sufficient time to allow pupils to elect to follow courses of study before the start of the academic year.

## **Local authorities**

- 2.14. Under section 33J of the 2000 Act (Planning the local curriculum), local authorities will be under a duty to assist Medr in planning the local curricula for students aged 16 to 18. ‘Planning the local curricula’ means the process by which Medr, in consultation with partners, decides which courses of study to include in the local curricula.
- 2.15. There is a duty on local authorities to take all reasonable steps to maximise the availability of courses of study available within the local curriculum (section 33K of the 2000 Act). This is to help ensure that the learner has the widest possible choice of courses from the local curriculum. At post-16 (ages 16 to 18), learners should be offered a breadth of courses, including general and vocational courses through a local curriculum offer.
- 2.16. A local curriculum must consist of courses of study, each of which falls within a category of the “learning domains”.
- 2.17. Local authorities must ensure that each course of study leads to a qualification approved or designated by Qualifications Wales for delivery in publicly funded programmes for 16 to 18 year olds.
- 2.18. Local authorities must also have regard to guidance issued by Welsh Ministers or by Medr and comply with directions of Welsh Ministers issued under section 33L of the 2000 Act.
- 2.19. Section 84 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 requires a local authority to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) and outlines that a Plan must contain how it will improve the planning of the provision of education through the medium of Welsh in its area; and improve the standards of Welsh-medium education and of the teaching of Welsh in its area. In relation to 16 to 18 learning, the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019 (the Schedule, paragraph 15) require local authorities to set out how they will support the continued provision of Welsh medium education for persons in year 10 and above by working collaboratively with other schools and FEIs if necessary; and how they will work with its schools and FEIs (if necessary) to co-ordinate the provision of Welsh as a subject to persons in year 10 and above in its schools.
- 2.20. The Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025 (the 2025 Act) aims to ensure, by 2050, that all pupils are independent and confident Welsh language users, at least, by the time they reach the end of compulsory school age. In particular, that all pupils develop oral skills equivalent to level B2, at least, of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The Act will be implemented incrementally, and full implementation of the Act could take more than 10 years. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans will remain a crucial part of Welsh in education planning at a local level and provisions in the 2025 Act build on the important work already achieved. Work to review the Welsh in education Strategic

Plan (Wales) Regulations 2019 to ensure full alignment with the Act will begin from 2027.

## **Maintained secondary schools with sixth forms and Further education institutions**

- 2.21. Once the functions of the 2000 Act in relation to planning the local curricula are transferred to Medr, the governing body and headteacher of any school, and the governing body and principal or chief executive officer of any FEI must assist Medr in the planning of the local curriculum or curricula for its area for learners aged 16 to 18.
- 2.22. There is a duty on governing bodies to take all reasonable steps to maximise the availability of courses of study available within the local curriculum. This is to help ensure that the learner has the widest possible choice of courses from the local curriculum, both general and vocational.
- 2.23. Schools and FEIs must work with local authorities and Medr to maximise the availability of courses within the locally developed curriculum framework to ensure learners aged 16 to 18 have access to a broad range of educational options and learning pathways.
- 2.24. When a learner elects to follow a particular course within the local curriculum, headteachers of schools and principals of an FEI can only refuse entitlement on specific statutory grounds, as outlined below:
  - The grounds set out in section 33G of the 2000 Act are as follows:
    - as a result of the student's level of educational attainment, the course of study is not suitable for him or her;
    - as a result of other elections made by the student under section 33E(1), it is not reasonably practicable for him or her to follow the course of study;
    - the amount of time likely to be spent travelling to the place at which the course is likely to be delivered would be detrimental to the student's education;
    - disproportionate expenditure would be incurred if the student were to follow the course of study;
    - the student's or another person's health or safety would be placed unacceptably at risk if the student were to follow the course of study.
  - If a headteacher or principal is satisfied that, in relation to decisions to remove entitlement, any of the grounds set out in 33I of the 2000 Act apply, then the headteacher or principal may decide that a learner is no longer entitled to follow a course of study that they were entitled previously to follow.
  - The grounds set out in section 33I of the 2000 Act are as follows:
    - the student's or another person's health or safety would be placed unacceptably at risk if the pupil were to continue to follow the course of study;
    - disproportionate expenditure would be incurred if the pupil were to continue to follow the course of study.
- 2.25. Under section 33H of the 2000 Act (Delivery of local curriculum entitlements), where a student (aged 16 to 18) is entitled to follow a course of study under section 33F(1) (Students' local curriculum entitlements), the governing body of the student's relevant

school or institution must ensure that during the entitlement period the course is made available to the student by or on behalf of the governing body.

- 2.26. Under section 33K of the 2000 Act (Delivery of local curriculum entitlements: joint working) and 33L of the 2000 Act (Joint-working: guidance and directions), schools and FEIs are required to engage in joint-working arrangements for both planning and delivering the local curriculum. This includes cooperation with local authorities, other schools and FEIs. In doing so they must take all reasonable steps to maximise the availability of courses of study included in a local curriculum. These arrangements will provide the opportunity to increase collaboration and play a role in increasing accessibility of post-compulsory education.
- 2.27. Headteachers and governing bodies of schools and principals and governing bodies of FEIs are also under a duty to have regard to guidance issued by Welsh Ministers or by Medr and to comply with directions of Welsh Ministers.

### **3. Formation and monitoring of local curricula**

- 3.1. This section outlines Welsh Government's expectations around Medr's role in the formation and monitoring of local curricula, plus production of guidance for local authorities, schools and FEIs, in more detail.

#### **Welsh language**

- 3.2. The Welsh Government strategy for the promotion and facilitation of the use of the Welsh language is [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh Speakers](#). This strategy was published in 2017 and sets out our long-term approach to achieving the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.
- 3.3. Education is a primary vehicle through which the Welsh language will be promoted, with Welsh-medium education ensuring that learners can develop their Welsh language skills. The strategy details aims for both statutory and post-compulsory education:
  - Statutory education – create a statutory education system which increases the number of confident Welsh speakers.
  - Post-compulsory education – develop post-compulsory education provision which increases rates of progression and supports everyone, whatever their command of the language, to develop Welsh language skills for use socially and in the workplace.
- 3.4. Section 1 of the 2025 Act enshrines the Cymraeg 2050 target as a statutory target and has introduced measures to promote the growth of Welsh medium education, seeking to make Welsh a natural part of everyday education in Wales. Section 24 of the 2025 Act places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to prepare a National Framework for Welsh Language Education and Learning Welsh, that will include teaching Welsh in tertiary education in Wales, and tertiary education through the medium of Welsh.
- 3.5. Within tertiary education, the 2025 Act builds on the strategic duties placed on Medr under the TER Act. Under Section 9 of the TER Act, Medr has a strategic duty to:

- Encourage demand for, and participation in, tertiary education provided through the medium of Welsh.
- Take all reasonable steps to ensure that there is sufficient tertiary education provided through the medium of Welsh to meet demand.
- Encourage the provision of tertiary education through the medium of Welsh.

3.6. In its strategic plan for 2025-2030, Medr set out its strategic aim to encourage greater use of the Welsh language, increasing demand for and participation in learning and assessment through the medium of Welsh. To achieve this, Medr has committed to work with stakeholders to develop and implement a National Plan for the Welsh Language in Tertiary Education to increase and improve the provision and promotion of Welsh-medium education and assessment; increasing participation, enabling seamless pathways for Welsh-medium education, and encouraging collaboration. The National Plan will be driven by a regulatory approach that whilst ambitious also acknowledges the unique context of each provider and their varying start points. Medr will consult on and publish a regulatory condition relating to the Welsh language, setting requirements for higher and further education institutions, apprenticeship providers, and adult community learning in Wales (the Welsh Language Condition). It is intended this condition will take full effect from August 2027. The Welsh Language Condition will serve as a key regulatory lever for change, ensuring providers' actions align with the objectives of the National Plan for the Welsh Language in Tertiary Education. The condition not only intends to establish Medr's baseline expectations for Welsh language provision and research within tertiary education but also drive continuous improvement across the sector.

3.7. In the formation of local curricula, Medr must promote the Welsh language, aiming to increase demand for, and participation in Welsh language education. This includes both the option to study the Welsh language as a subject – wherever learners are on the Welsh language continuum – and to study other subjects through the medium of Welsh. In doing so, Medr will promote linguistic continuity through different levels of education, increasing the number of coherent educational pathways available in Welsh. Under section 33B of the 2000 Act Medr is also under a duty to exercise its functions in relation to local curricula so as to promote access to and availability of courses of study which are taught through the medium of the Welsh language.

3.8. The promotion of opportunities for learners to learn through the medium of Welsh and improve their levels of ability in Welsh should be an integral part of the planning of local curricula for 16 to 18 learners. Local curriculum planners will play a key role in ensuring that learners who followed some or all subjects through the medium of Welsh at 14-16 continue to do so post-16. Medr should take all reasonable steps to ensure that Medr's duties under the TER Act are reflected in curricula design.

3.9. The quality of a learner's linguistic experience should be viewed holistically when planning the local curriculum. Curriculum planners should support learners to continue to follow their education through the medium of the Welsh language and all reasonable steps should be taken to promote and support the Welsh language when planning the delivery of the local curriculum.

3.10. For a course to be classified as a Welsh-medium course within a local curriculum, all aspects of the course should be available through the Welsh language; the teaching and the assessment procedure in its entirety and the learning resources where appropriate.

- 3.11. Within the parameters for the formation of local curricula, Medr should set an expectation that where a learner attends a Welsh medium or dual language school, learners are supported to continue in their studies through the medium of Welsh.
- 3.12. For schools defined as Welsh-medium schools or dual-language schools in [Guidance on school categories according to Welsh-medium provision](#), any increase in provision should be through the medium of Welsh. Welsh school language categories are due to change, as outlined in the 2025 Act, redefining schools as 'Primarily Welsh language schools', 'Dual language schools' and 'Primarily English language, partly Welsh schools'. Once these categories come into force, this section will be applied to Primarily Welsh language and Dual language schools.
- 3.13. Medr should also encourage providers to seek to support learners to access study through the medium of Welsh where this may not be provided by them directly; this may include online and hybrid delivery options such as E-Sgol, and collaborative partnerships. E-Sgol has an important role in promoting, facilitating and supporting collaborative arrangements between Welsh-medium schools, enabling them to expand access to post-16 provision where learner numbers or staffing capacity may otherwise limit opportunities. The provision of online or hybrid courses through the medium of Welsh and Welsh language as a subject, can be an effective method to increase the number of courses available in Welsh within local curricula. A similar role can be played through collaboration and partnerships between Welsh medium schools and FEIs, to increase face to face provision of Welsh language courses. Medr should also consider the need for partnerships across local authority boundaries and help facilitate this where it is likely to assist the development of Welsh language provision.
- 3.14. To ensure learners have access to a broad and meaningful local curriculum offer, where a course is offered in both Welsh and English locally, for the purposes of learner choice it should not be double counted towards any target set by Medr. While Medr should generally aim to reduce unnecessary duplication in the formation of local curricula, this should not be at the expense of courses available in Welsh.
- 3.15. In fulfilling its duties in relation to 16 to 18 local curricula and the Welsh language, Medr must have regard to any relevant advice given by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, as the body designated by Welsh Ministers to advise Medr relation to its duties relating to the Welsh language.

## **14 to 16 qualifications reform**

- 3.16. [National 14-16 Qualifications](#) are being reformed to support the aims and purposes of Curriculum for Wales, providing a bilingual suite of relevant, equitable made-for-Wales qualifications. New qualifications are being introduced in a phased way and will be available for first teaching between September 2025 and September 2027. They will be awarded for the first time to Year 11 learners as follows:
  - Summer 2027 – Wave 1 GCSEs.
  - Summer 2028 – Wave 2 GCSEs.
  - Summer 2029 – Wave 3 qualifications – Vocational Certificates of Secondary Education (VCSEs); Skills Suite and Personal Project; Foundation qualifications (some Skills Suite units may be awarded earlier).

- 3.17. As these learners move into year 12, it is important that local curricula include courses which allow learners to progress further in the subjects they have enjoyed and succeeded in at school. Local curricula will therefore need to take account of and be designed with reference to the National 14 to 16 Qualifications offered in local schools.
- 3.18. VCSEs are new, work-related vocational qualifications at Level 1 and Level 2, designed to enable students to learn about occupational areas through a practical approach to learning and assessment. While VCSEs are not competency qualifications they are designed to support progression into post-16 vocational study. Ahead of September 2029, Medr should ensure that curriculum planners use information on the VCSEs being offered in local schools to 14 to 16 learners and include vocational courses that provide meaningful progression from these VCSEs within local curricula. For the cohorts of learners starting Year 12 in 2027 and 2028, curriculum planners should consider existing 14 to 16 vocational qualifications being sat by learners in school.
- 3.19. Providers may need to assess value for money and local demand for subjects where potential uptake is low. However, consideration must also be given to ensuring that learners are able to continue with their chosen pathways. This may involve the utilisation of online or hybrid options, or schools and FEIs working collaboratively to broaden the number of options made available to learners through their local curriculum, while also reducing duplication. Joint planning that extends across local authority borders is also encouraged, so that the widest range of options for all learners can be considered when designing and planning the offer, particularly for subjects where there is low demand such as Cymraeg, international languages, agriculture and music. In all cases, it will be important for curriculum planners to consider and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning provided to learners.

## **Inclusive offer**

- 3.20. A lack of suitable post 16 options for learners can increase their risk of becoming NEET. Learners therefore need access to an appropriate range of courses below level 3 to help support them to continue to participate in further education and to make progress at the pace that is right for them. This includes those learners taking new 14 to 16 foundation qualifications from 2027. (These are qualifications spanning Entry Level and Level 1 for learners that are not ready for GCSE and/or VCSE study at age 14 to 16.)
- 3.21. An inclusive 16–18 curriculum offer should ensure that every young person, regardless of their background, ability, or ambition, has a meaningful pathway into further education, training, or employment. This will be an essential element in maximising participation in post 16 education and training, supporting learner retention at all levels and providing flexible progression routes for a diverse range of learners. For example, the availability of an inclusive range of post-16 courses in local curricula will help remove barriers for ALN learners who wish to continue their learning in mainstream settings. It should also provide progression routes for learners seeking to move from pre-16 EOTAS provision and Pupil Referral Units, into a further education setting, where they are not ready to undertake level 3 qualifications in year 12. Young people with significant barriers to engagement, who are being supported through the [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework](#), also benefit from

inclusive post-16 courses that will re-engage them and enable them to move forwards onto an appropriate progression route.

- 3.22. Medr should therefore engage with 16 to 18 curriculum planners, ensuring learners across Wales have access to a broad range of qualifications at varying levels, drawing on knowledge of the likely attainment and aspirations of pre-16 cohorts.
- 3.23. We recognise it will not be possible or efficient for all schools and FEIs in a local authority area to provide a full range of courses below Level 3. Therefore, we do not necessarily expect Medr to include the full range in the formation of local curricula. However, it is important as part of their wider statutory duty to plan, fund and ensure adequate post 16 provision that an appropriate range of courses below level 3 is available within local areas and is accessible for learners.
- 3.24. There are also vocational subjects that require learners to undertake Level 1 or Level 2 qualifications, prior to progressing to Level 3. Where curriculum planners include these subjects within local curricula, Medr should ensure that the courses available facilitate learners' progression to level 3 qualifications. It will also be important for schools and FEIs to help learners understand the qualification pathways available to them, where they need to undertake a qualification below level 3. In doing so, they may wish to make use of the 'Learner Journey' documents produced by Qualifications Wales on different vocational sectors.

## **Additional Learning Needs**

- 3.25. The [Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(Wales\) Act 2018](#) (ALNET Act) together with the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales and associated regulations establishes the statutory system for supporting learners with additional learning needs (ALN) in Wales. It has established a unified, inclusive, and person-centred system of support for children and young people aged 0–25 with ALN.
- 3.26. [The Additional Learning Needs \(Wales\) Regulations 2021](#) make provision for a range of matters related to the operation of the ALN system. [The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales \(2021\)](#) impose requirements on the governing bodies of schools in Wales, governing bodies of FEIs, health and local authorities related to the operation of the ALN system and the exercise of functions under it.
- 3.27. Under section 4 of the TER Act (Encouraging participation in tertiary education), Medr has a strategic duty to promote equality of opportunity and encourage participation in tertiary education for all eligible learners. In its strategic plan, Medr has committed to ensuring that people from underrepresented groups, including those with ALN are supported to access learning that is right for them, by promoting a person-centred approach.
- 3.28. Medr should ensure that the needs of learners with ALN are factored into decision-making. In forming 16 to 18 local curricula, Medr should work with curriculum planners so that learners with ALN can access courses aligned with their education to date within mainstream settings.
- 3.29. Medr is a listed public authority in Schedule 18 (Part 2) of the [Equality Act 2010](#) and is therefore required to adhere with the Welsh specific duties under [The Equality Act 2010 \(Statutory Duties\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2011](#).

3.30. Medr's obligations apply to schools and FEI settings; they do not extend to special needs settings as they are not funded or registered by Medr.

## **Role of learner voice and demand-led curricula**

3.31. Given the degree of specialisation within curricula at 16, with learners following a small number of courses in depth in general and vocational programmes, it is critical that 16 to 18 curricula are learner-centred and take into account the courses that learners want to follow.

3.32. While seeking to maximise the number of courses available in local curricula, Medr should ensure that learner demand is adequately considered in the choice of courses, so that there is a realistic likelihood of learners choosing them. In order to support the provision of Cymraeg and core Cymraeg as a subject, low uptake in previous years should not be a determinative factor in deciding whether to deliver these courses. Any learner wanting to continue studying Cymraeg or core Cymraeg should be entitled to do so.

3.33. In assessing the learner demand that will inform local curricula design, curriculum planners will need to consider appropriate data sources, both at a local and national level. These may include:

- Data on courses currently being followed by 16 to 18 learners.
- Data on interests / preferences of current 14 to 16 learners, the courses they have chosen to study and how this might influence selected pathways for 16 to 18 study.
- Intelligence and data from Careers Wales e.g. Y10 Careers Check.
- Learner voice – views of existing 16 to 18 learners on their curriculum choices.

3.34. In relation to learner voice, section 129 of the TER Act gives Medr a duty to prepare and publish a Learner Engagement Code. This Code is intended to ensure learners' interests are represented, that learners can give their views to providers about the quality of education they receive, and to participate in the making of decisions by those providers.

3.35. Medr should encourage and support schools and FEIs to engage a diverse range of learners in the planning of their curricula in future years, including gathering and using learner feedback on current curricula.

3.36. The Welsh Government acknowledges the need for curriculum planners and Medr to balance all of the above sources of information against other external factors such as local economy needs and available resources.

## **Economy and labour market**

3.37. While the design of local curricula should be shaped closely by learner demand, it should also be informed by labour market intelligence and aligned with local, regional and national priorities. This can include local job opportunities, local demand and skill gaps within the local area, regional and national labour markets and the demand for skills within these economies.

3.38. Medr should encourage and support local curriculum planners to utilise data from recognised sources, including engaging with regional skills partnerships, local authorities, Careers Wales, Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) and employer networks to identify:

- High-demand sectors and occupations
- Skills shortages and gaps
- Growth industries and declining sectors
- Emerging and future workforce needs

3.39. To ensure that local curricula are designed to meet these needs, Medr should seek to improve communications between these bodies and local authorities, schools and FEIs. Curricula should be kept under review to ensure continued alignment with local and regional labour market developments and ambitions.

3.40. Medr should support providers in translating skills that have been identified to align with local and regional market needs, into tangible pathways that inform the local curricula design, offering a range of specific and transferable skills. In doing so, they may wish to draw on advice from Qualifications Wales on qualifications pathways, drawing on their work to develop 'learner journeys' for learners and parents.

3.41. In relation to Welsh Language skills within the workforce, Medr should work with and draw on advice from partners, including the National Centre for Learning Welsh, the Welsh Language Commissioner, the Commission for Welsh-Speaking Communities, the Education Workforce Council, Regional Skills Partnerships and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to identify sectors within the economy where there are Welsh language skill gaps. Medr may decide to target priority sector areas where Welsh language skills gaps have been identified, in order to increase the availability of Welsh-medium vocational provision in these areas.

3.42. Local curricula planners should be able to demonstrate to Medr how curricula have been informed by and contributes to achieving both local and regional labour market needs and strategic economic ambitions, and how they evaluate the success of their local curriculum in supporting their learners' access to skilled jobs within the labour market.

## **Encouraging and facilitating collaboration**

3.43. Strengthening collaboration within tertiary education is one of the key objectives of the TER Act and is one of Medr's strategic duties.

3.44. Collaboration and partnership working will be a key component of the effective design and implementation of 16 to 18 local curriculum offers, enabling providers to better respond to the emerging and changing needs of learners, employers, and communities.

3.45. A key objective of the 2000 Act is to maximise the availability of courses of study included in a local curriculum (section 33K of the 2000 Act). The legislation provides that the duty includes, but is not limited to, a duty to seek to enter into cooperation arrangements where the relevant persons (i.e. local authorities and governors of schools and FEIs) have concluded that it would further the objective to enter into such arrangements.

- 3.46. Collaboration between schools and FEIs should seek to maximise the coherence of offer across different institutions and increase the opportunities available to learners, while also reducing unnecessary duplication.
- 3.47. In undertaking their duty to promote collaboration between providers, Medr should encourage curriculum planners to improve the quality and availability of impartial advice to 14 to 16 learners on the courses available to them after compulsory education. Medr may wish to refer schools to the 14-16 learning guidance, which sets an expectation that schools should ensure 'that learners have dedicated time and are supported to consider the full range of options available to them post-16. This could include, but is not limited to, continuing education at school, at an FEI or taking up an apprenticeship'.

## **Monitoring local curricula and ensuring equality of opportunity for learners**

- 3.48. Medr plays a vital role in ensuring that all learners aged 16–18 can access inclusive and high-quality educational experiences.
- 3.49. Medr should monitor the delivery of local curricula, ensuring that curriculum requirements are being met, and surface and investigate problems where they arise. This will include ensuring that local curricula offers are deliverable and accessible for learners. In this function, Medr will be expected to give consideration to the offer available to learners across Wales, ensuring that learners have access to a curriculum that is broad and meets the expectations set out in this guidance, while recognising resource constraints.
- 3.50. Where issues in delivering an adequate local curriculum and/or ensuring equality of opportunity for learners have been identified, Medr should work with curriculum planners to facilitate collaborative solutions.

## **4. 16 to 18 programme funding and design**

- 4.1. The OECD have said - 'Learners' pathways through upper secondary education are shaped by the curriculum that sets out a vision for education, the programmes learners take, and the systems of assessment and certification that serve as the ultimate goalposts' ([What shapes upper secondary pathways and transitions? | OECD](#)).
- 4.2. Following the end of compulsory school education in Wales at 16, there is no national curriculum for 16 to 18 learners that all schools and FEIs must offer. In this context, the role played by the programmes and qualifications that schools and FEIs can offer to their learners have an increased significance for learners' pathways.
- 4.3. The qualifications for 16 to 18 year olds that are eligible for public funding in schools and FEIs are determined by Qualifications Wales and published on the Qualifications in Wales website.
- 4.4. A programme is a package of learning with an intended outcome for learners such as progression into employment or onto further or higher education. Programmes are designed by Medr and used to determine the funding for providers for full and part

time programmes, from Entry Level to Level 4. They provide a common framework for providers, without being overly prescriptive, allowing providers to factor in the needs of their learners and local context to their overall 16 to 18 curriculum offer.

- 4.5. Given the significance of programme design and funding requirements on learners' pathways and experience through 16 to 18 education, this section sets out the Welsh Government priorities and expectations that Medr should take into account when designing programmes.
- 4.6. This section should also be used by schools and FEIs in setting their individual 16 to 18 curriculum offers.

## **Building on the 14 to 16 learner entitlement**

- 4.7. A school's curriculum offer in Years 10 and 11 must provide learners with a broad and balanced profile of learning and experiences and should be designed with reference to the 4 components of the 14 to 16 learner entitlement:
  - Reflections on learning and progress and post-16 planning.
  - Qualifications in literacy and numeracy.
  - Qualifications to encourage breadth.
  - Wider learning and experiences across the curriculum.
- 4.8. As learners progress onto more specialised programmes of learning post-16, their learning should continue to include:
  - Reflections on learning and progress and planning for next steps.
  - Development of skills in literacy and numeracy.
  - Main qualifications.
  - Wider learning and experiences.

## **Reflections on learning and progress and planning for next steps**

- 4.9. Building on their experience in school, 16 to 18 learners should continue to benefit from dedicated curriculum time to reflect on their progress and to plan their next steps into further or higher education, or employment. As learners reflect on their learning, progress and future plans, they should be supported to consider their strengths, needs, behaviours and to explore and plan for their transition at 18 or 19.
- 4.10. It is important that learners have dedicated time and advice to consider the full range of options available to them at the end of their 16 to 18 education, and that they are subsequently supported to reach the destination to which they aspire. Providers will be best placed to design what this looks like for different groups of learners, and it should be tailored to meet learners' specific needs. It is likely to include:
  - Support with applications / personal statements.
  - Interview advice and practice.
  - Employability support.
  - Work-related experience.
  - Access to Careers Wales information, advice and guidance and resources.

- 4.11. In delivering advice and guidance, schools and FEIs should draw on the services provided by Careers Wales, who can help learners to better understand the world of work, the skills they need and the opportunities available to them. Careers Wales careers advisers are linked to every sixth form and FEI, giving all post-16 learners access to impartial careers guidance.
- 4.12. Post-16 learners in schools and FEIs can self-refer and book their own careers guidance appointments (face to face or online) at a time and place that best suits them. These structured conversations then help learners reflect on their attainment, interests and barriers, and translate that into practical next-step plans (e.g. courses, apprenticeships, employment). Through the Careers Wales Working Wales service they can also refer 16–19 year olds to a range of Welsh Government employability programmes and opportunities under the Young Person’s Guarantee, designed to help them gain skills, experience, and progress into further education, training, or work. Key programmes include: Jobs Growth Wales +, ReAct+, Apprenticeships, Personal Learning Accounts and self- employment support.
- 4.13. Further and higher education institutions, and work-based learning providers, can also support learners planning for next steps by showcasing the variety of academic, apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities available to them, to help raise learners’ aspirations and broaden their horizons.
- 4.14. Schools and FEIs should take advantage of programmes such as the [Seren Academy](#) and [Reaching Wider](#) to support learners from a variety of backgrounds and abilities to consider and access higher education. As part of this they should continue to support their existing and new Seren cohorts to ensure that the brightest learners, who have the potential for high attainment, benefit from Seren’s comprehensive programme of interventions. (The Seren Academy offers academic stretch and challenge, vital information and guidance, and opportunities to develop essential skills, supporting learners progressively from Year 7 through to Year 13.) Reaching Wider is a partnership of universities, schools and FEIs in Wales, working together to improve social mobility. Programmes delivered through Reaching Wider offer learners the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills and understanding about higher education and to explore and consider opportunities available to them.

## Main qualifications

- 4.15. In contrast to the breadth of curriculum experienced by learners pre-16 under Curriculum for Wales, 16 to 18 education should provide learners with the opportunity to specialise, studying a smaller number of subjects in depth, supporting progression to further study in higher education or employment.
- 4.16. The main qualifications chosen by learners will be informed by their strengths, interests and future pathways and aspirations. Learners may choose to follow programmes that lead to general qualifications (AS and A levels), vocational qualifications, or a combination of general and vocational.
- 4.17. As Estyn<sup>1</sup> have noted, in the best cases, the exact composition of learning programmes is matched carefully to individual learners’ needs and abilities. This includes considering the number of main qualifications learners follow, and how they

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<sup>1</sup> [A review of the current 16-19 curriculum in Wales](#)

are combined. For example, learners may choose to study two A levels alongside the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales (AdvSBW), instead of three A levels, having discussed with their school or FEI their preferences and qualifications likely to support them to progress into university.

## **Development of skills in literacy and numeracy**

- 4.18. As part of their 16 to 18 programmes, all learners should continue to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy, deepening and strengthening the cross-curricular skills they formed under Curriculum for Wales.
- 4.19. For some learners this may be through their main qualification choices. The development of literacy, numeracy and digital skills are also embedded in the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales which all learners on level 3 programmes should be offered and encouraged to follow.
- 4.20. From September 2027, learners who did not achieve a level 2 pass (i.e. GCSE C grade or above) in English Language and Literature or Cymraeg Language and Literature (single or double award) and/or Mathematics (double award) at 16, should be supported to both develop their literacy and numeracy skills and given the opportunity to obtain a level 2 qualification which demonstrates their attainment in these skills. For most learners, this will either be through a GCSE in English, Mathematics and/or Cymraeg, or an Essential Skills Wales qualification in Application of Number and/or Communication Skills.

## **English, Mathematics and Cymraeg GCSEs within post-16 programmes**

- 4.21. English, Mathematics and Cymraeg GCSEs remain an important way for learners to demonstrate their literacy and numeracy skills, and may be used by higher education institutions and employers as part of their admissions/recruitment processes. Therefore, it is important for 16 to 18 year olds who have not achieved a level 2 pass in English/Cymraeg Language and Literature and/or Mathematics at school to be given the opportunity to do so as part of their post-16 programme, where they have a reasonable chance of achieving a C grade or better.
- 4.22. GCSE resits, however, should not be used in an untargeted way as there can also be negative impacts on learner wellbeing, participation and attainment in other qualifications if learners retake qualifications one, two or more times during their 16 to 18 programme without success.
- 4.23. Learners who will be resitting English, Cymraeg or Mathematics GCSEs post-16 will have already benefited from extensive teaching and learning in these subjects from years 7 to 11. It is important that the teaching available to them post-16 is of sufficient time and quality to allow them to achieve a GCSE C grade or higher. (This should also be a consideration when centres are deciding whether to enter learners into November or summer examination series in year 12; November entry is likely to be the exception, rather than a whole cohort approach).
- 4.24. In most cases, decisions to enter learners into English, Cymraeg and/or Mathematics GCSEs post-16 should take into account:
  - Learners' prior attainment in these qualifications. For learners being entered for resits, this is likely to be a D grade, although there may be individual cases where

centres judge that learners with a grade below D have a reasonable chance of achieving a C grade.

- Learners' aspirations and likely pathways for further education or employment at 18 or 19, given the importance of a C grade in English/Cymraeg and Mathematics for many pathways.

4.25. From September 2027, in Mathematics, learners will need to resit the GCSE Mathematics (Double Award). Centres will need to plan for how they will use the unitised structure of this qualification to give learners the best opportunity to achieve a C grade or better.

4.26. For English and Cymraeg, centres will have a choice of GCSEs in which to enter learners. These are:

- English/Cymraeg Language and Literature GCSE (single or double award) – resits of integrated GCSEs sat in Year 11.
- Post -16 GCSEs in English Language and Cymraeg Language - for post-16 learners who wish to take a new GCSE in language, rather than resitting integrated Language and Literature GCSEs.
- GCSE 9-1 English Language – for use in exceptional circumstances e.g. for post-16 learners in Welsh FEIs who attended secondary school in England and wish to resit the same GCSE they entered in Year 11.

4.27. Schools and FEIs should decide on the most appropriate GCSE qualification(s) for their learners, taking into account learners' needs, preferences (including language) and their capacity to effectively teach the qualifications.

## **Essential Skills Wales qualifications**

4.28. Essential Skills Wales qualifications are available from entry level 1 to level 3 and are designed to assess the essential skills that learners need for successful learning, employment, and life. They focus on the practical application of these skills, especially learners' capacity to transfer their knowledge and understanding between contexts and purposes.

4.29. For many 16 to 18 learners seeking to obtain a level 2 pass in literacy and numeracy qualifications as part of their 16 to 18 programme, Essential Skills Wales qualifications in Application of Number and/or Communication Skills will be the most appropriate route. This route provides a valuable opportunity for learners to evidence skills in these subjects, who might be unlikely to pass or who may not need GCSE C grades in these subjects for their chosen pathway and aspirations for their further education and employment.

## **Wider learning and experiences**

4.30. In addition to the learning undertaken as part of their main qualifications, learners will continue to benefit and develop from the wider learning and experiences available to them as part of their 16 to 18 programmes. These can continue to provide learners with opportunities to develop towards the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, and may include sports, music, drama and community participation, participation in skills competitions, learner-led societies, student union groups etc.

## **Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales**

4.31. The four purposes are underpinned by integral skills that all learners will benefit from continuing to develop within their 16 to 18 programmes. These skills are:

- Creativity and innovation.
- Critical thinking and problem-solving.
- Personal effectiveness.
- Planning and organising.

4.32. The Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales (AdvSBW) is a standalone skills-based Level 3 qualification equivalent in size to an A level. The AdvSBW supports learners to become effective, responsible, and active citizens ready to take their place in a sustainable global society and in the workplace. It promotes learning inside and outside of the classroom with learners encouraged to choose areas of study which are of personal interest and linked to their future studies and careers.

4.33. Through completing the AdvSBW qualification, learners will:

- develop, apply and be assessed on the integral skills.
- have opportunities to further develop their skills of literacy, numeracy and digital competence (the 'embedded' skills).

4.34. Employers helped to develop the AdvSBW, recognising that it helps young people develop the skills that employers need in their workforce. Similarly, the majority of universities accept AdvSBW as an entry requirement equivalent to an A-level, while those that don't value it for the broader skills and experiences that it gives the young person. AdvSBW can therefore enhance applications, including personal statements and interviews, to both higher education and employers.

4.35. The AdvSBW should be available and offered to all learners aged 16 to 18 on a 2-year, level 3 course. It will normally be taken alongside other Level 3 qualifications, such as a combination of A levels and (or) vocational qualifications. All eligible learners should be encouraged to undertake the AdvSBW, although schools and FEIs should take into account the individual needs and circumstances of learners, as they would for any qualification.

## **Skills Suite and Personal Project**

4.36. From September 2027, for learners undertaking a programme whose main qualifications are at Level 2 or below, centres should consider how new made-for-Wales Skills for Life and Skills for Work qualifications can be used to develop and deepen their learners' integral and wider skills. Centres should incorporate these qualifications in their curriculum offer where this is in the best interest of learners and supports their progression. Medr will need to decide how to incorporate these qualifications within 16 to 18 funded programmes.

4.37. For example, learners undertaking L1 or L2 vocational qualifications may benefit from undertaking a selection of Skills for Work units from the Skills Suite. Separately, the Personal Project – available from Entry Level to Level 2 – enables learners to develop and demonstrate the four integral skills through in-depth engagement with a subject of their choice.