

Planning for future generations

Setting well-being objectives at Qualifications Wales

March 2026

About us

We have prepared and published this report under section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

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Contents

Audit snapshot	4
Key facts and figures	6
Our findings	7
Recommendations	16
Appendices	17
1 About our work	18
2 Key terms in this report	20

Audit snapshot

What we looked at

- 1 Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act), Qualifications Wales and certain other public bodies must set 'well-being objectives' to create a better Wales, both now and in the future. Having set these objectives, public bodies must also take all reasonable steps to meet them.
- 2 In setting objectives, public bodies must consider the impact on the national 'well-being goals' set out in the Act. They must also involve the public and other stakeholders in the process and consider how they might collaborate with partners to deliver. Ultimately, public bodies must take a longer-term view, so they can meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This is known as the 'sustainable development principle'.
- 3 We looked at how Qualifications Wales applied the sustainable development principle as it set its well-being objectives and began planning to deliver them. Qualifications Wales started developing the objectives in January 2023 and published them in June 2024.

Why this is important

- 4 Well-being objectives should set the strategic direction for public bodies. They should help public bodies plan the short- and medium-term actions they need to take to improve the well-being of the people and places they serve. If the Act is to have the desired impact, it will be important for public bodies to set their objectives effectively and to communicate how they have done that clearly.

What we have found

- 5 We found that Qualifications Wales has applied the sustainable development principle to set well-being objectives that sit at the heart of the organisation, and with a clear framework to support delivery. It has identified success criteria for its objectives but has not yet defined which indicators it might use to report performance.

What we recommend

- 6 We have made two recommendations. They focus on exploring the connections between Qualifications Wales' well-being objectives and other bodies' objectives and reporting on the impact Qualifications Wales is having against the well-being objectives.

Key facts and figures

Well-being in Wales

- 7** National **well-being goals** for Wales
- More equal
 - Resilient
 - Globally responsible
 - Vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
 - Healthier
 - Prosperous
 - Cohesive communities

- 5** **Ways of working** that bodies must take into account when applying the sustainable development principle:
- Long term
 - Integration
 - Involvement
 - Collaboration
 - Prevention

Qualifications Wales' well-being objectives

- 3** **Well-being objectives** set by Qualifications Wales for 2024-2035:
- To shape qualifications that prepare and support learners in life, learning and work, and promote equality of opportunity.
 - To develop an agile qualification system for Wales that responds to socio-economic changes, meeting learners' needs whilst protecting the value of the qualifications they receive.
 - To operate as a forward-thinking high-performing and inclusive organisation that delivers for the people of Wales.

Our findings

Planning

Qualifications Wales drew on relevant information, including about future trends, to set well-being objectives that sit at the heart of the organisation

Overall approach

- 7 Qualifications Wales became a named body under the Act on 30 June 2024. It was required to set its first well-being objectives by the end of March 2025.¹
- 8 Qualifications Wales decided to incorporate its well-being objectives as part of its corporate plan. This reflects statutory guidance and good practice. As Qualifications Wales was due to refresh its corporate plan in 2024 and knew that it would become subject to the Act, it opted to set its objectives before the statutory deadline.
- 9 Qualifications Wales published its new corporate plan and well-being objectives in June 2024. The plan also includes Qualifications Wales' 'well-being statement'.²

¹ Initially, the Welsh Government had proposed that Qualifications Wales, along with seven other public bodies, would become a named body under the Act from 1 April 2023. It would then have been required to set well-being objectives by March 2024. The timetable later changed.

² Section 7 (1) (c) of the Act requires public bodies to publish a statement when publishing well-being objectives, known as 'well-being statements'. These statements must include specific information, such as the steps that public bodies propose to take to meet their well-being objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle.

- 10 Qualifications Wales considers that the Act has always influenced its operations, and that it is well placed to deliver on its new duties. Qualifications Wales is also keen to continue strengthening its implementation of the legislation. It sought advice from the Commissioner's office on how it should approach setting its well-being objectives. It also met with various other Welsh Government arm's length bodies to learn from their experience of setting well-being objectives.
- 11 Qualifications Wales has used the Commissioner's 'maturity matrix' twice since setting its well-being objectives. This tool has helped staff to reflect on progress in implementing the Act and identify where Qualifications Wales can go further.

Understanding the short and longer term

- 12 In developing its well-being objectives, Qualifications Wales focused on ensuring that the qualification system works for both the short and longer term. It decided to set well-being objectives that extend to 2035.
- 13 Qualifications Wales explored future trends to help it do this. Its role is tightly defined, focused on regulating awarding bodies that offer non-degree qualifications. However, it considered a broad range of trends to help it understand the long-term challenges for the qualification system and the impact of qualifications on learners over their lives.
- 14 Qualifications Wales analysed key evidence sources, including the Welsh Government's [Future Trends report](#), [Well-being of Wales report](#) and the Future Generations Commissioner's strategy '[Cymru Can](#)'. It identified relevant trends, including an ageing population, inequalities, and technological change. Qualifications Wales then explored the trends with staff (see **paragraph 20**).
- 15 Qualifications Wales has continued to build on its exploration of future trends since publishing its well-being objectives. The executive team and Board receive presentations on relevant trends as part of their cycle of meetings. Qualifications Wales recognises that understanding the future is necessary to prepare the qualifications system to meet the needs of learners and the economy over time.

- 16 Qualifications Wales also used its own evidence sources to inform the setting of its well-being objectives. For example, research projects and annual qualifications data that it routinely publishes.
- 17 Qualifications Wales reviews progress in delivering its activities each year. It describes progress in its annual reports. However, it did not have specific performance measures linked to corporate priorities when it was developing the well-being objectives. Reviewing such information would have been helpful to inform that process.

Involving others

- 18 Qualifications Wales set up a task and finish group in January 2023 to oversee the development of its well-being objectives. The group included a member of the executive team, and other key staff with a role in designing and delivering the objectives.
- 19 The task and finish group prepared an engagement plan. This set out how Qualifications Wales would involve staff, board members, and wider stakeholders throughout the process of developing the objectives.
- 20 Qualifications Wales ran a mandatory session for all staff to provide their views in autumn 2023. Staff explored future trends and suggested external influences that might impact the organisation and shape its well-being objectives. A member of the Commissioner's team attended to present on the Act.
- 21 Qualifications Wales provided further informal opportunities for staff to contribute and reflect on the draft well-being objectives. It set up 'thinking walls' in office communal areas, encouraging staff to add their thoughts. However, Qualifications Wales reflected that it was difficult for staff to input meaningfully in this way on high-level objectives.

- 22 Qualifications Wales also consulted with its one recognised trade union at a 'formative stage', from early 2023. It then ensured the trade union representative could contribute views at various other meetings. This reflects specific requirements of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act 2023. We heard that Qualifications Wales has a very constructive relationship with the trade union.
- 23 Qualifications Wales sought the views of key stakeholders on the draft objectives and invited views on appetite for change and lifelong learning. It met with 17 different stakeholder groups, allowing it to reach 25 key partner organisations. This included teaching unions, the School College Leaders Reference Group, the Association of Director of Education in Wales (ADEW), Regional Skills Partnerships, and Heads of the Regional Education Consortia.^{3,4}
- 24 This engagement also included Qualifications Wales' learner advisory group. The group exists to act as 'a critical friend' and represent the voice of different learners, from all parts of Wales. Qualifications Wales has found recruiting and retaining learners challenging but is working to involve a more diverse range.
- 25 Qualifications Wales also involved Parentkind, a UK-wide charity representing parents. It has since established its own parent and carers forum to provide insights that will support its work and identify how it can communicate its role more effectively. It intends to involve the forum when setting future well-being objectives.
- 26 Qualifications Wales notes it has undertaken significant consultations in recent years; most recently for the new National 14-16 Qualifications. It told us the responses also helped inform its thinking on the well-being objectives.

³ There are four Regional Skills Partnerships across Wales. They are in place to drive investment in skills and provide labour market intelligence to the Welsh Government.

⁴ There were four regional education consortia in Wales at the time. They worked with schools in their regions to raise standards in literacy and numeracy, providing a range of support which included professional development and intervention programmes.

- 27 The executive team was involved in developing the well-being objectives from the outset. It included them as a regular item on its agenda. Qualifications Wales' Board was also involved at the start of the process and later provided views on the draft objectives. It approved the final corporate plan and well-being objectives, following executive team approval, in April 2024.
- 28 Qualifications Wales' corporate plan describes how it intends to involve others in delivering its well-being objectives. For example, its third objective places an emphasis on being an 'inclusive organisation'.

Integrated thinking

- 29 Qualifications Wales has designed its well-being objectives to help meet its two principal aims, as defined in the [Qualifications Wales Act 2015](#).⁵ However, it has also considered the wider contribution it can make to the well-being of Wales.
- 30 Qualifications Wales' corporate plan sets out how, through delivering its well-being objectives, it intends to help deliver across the national well-being goals. It has also listed the national indicators it considers it can contribute to.
- 31 In developing its objectives, Qualifications Wales considered how it can help deliver Welsh Government priorities. Crucially, by ensuring qualifications relate to and support the new curriculum for Wales. Qualifications Wales receives an annual remit letter from the Welsh Government and reflected those priorities in the corporate plan, and its supporting plans (see **paragraph 35**).

⁵ The two aims are: to ensure that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales; and to promote public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system.

- 32 While it was setting its objectives, Qualifications Wales took the opportunity to discuss relevant issues with the Welsh Government at its routine quarterly meetings. Qualifications Wales was keen to understand how the Welsh Government was applying the Act in education and to ensure it could align its own activity.
- 33 Qualifications Wales reviewed the well-being objectives and wider priorities of other public bodies. This covered certain other Welsh Government arm's-length bodies, such as Social Care Wales and Amgueddfa Cymru, that had objectives and priorities relating to learning. There are other bodies, such as local authorities and now Medr, that are likely to have relevant objectives that Qualifications Wales could benefit from reviewing in future.⁶
- 34 Qualifications Wales also believes that it can play a valuable role influencing other organisations that are not subject to the Act, for example WJEC.⁷ Qualifications Wales aims to achieve this through the way it works in partnership to deliver shared ambitions.

Resourcing and delivery

Qualifications Wales has a clear strategic and operational planning framework to support delivery of its well-being objectives

- 35 Qualifications Wales' well-being objectives are part of a clear planning framework. It has adopted a 'three horizons' model, where objectives and related plans align over the short, medium, and long-term. Its 'three horizons' are as follows:
- The annual business plan, which sets out operational priorities and key activities to support the strategic and corporate plans.

⁶ Medr is the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research. It was established in August 2024 through the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022.

⁷ WJEC develops and provides qualifications, support and assessments to schools in Wales.

- The strategic plan, which is a rolling five-year plan setting out Qualifications Wales' programmes of work. The current period is 2025-2030.
- The corporate plan, which sets out the long-term well-being objectives to 2035.

- 36 Within this model, Qualifications Wales develops actions in its annual business plan to deliver its medium-term strategic plan and its longer-term corporate plan. This ensures Qualifications Wales is taking practical action designed to deliver its well-being objectives.
- 37 Qualifications Wales has opted not to set out the steps it will take to deliver its well-being objectives in the corporate plan and well-being statement.⁸ It has instead provided detail on the action it intends to take in the strategic plan, and particularly the business plan. Qualifications Wales publishes these documents, meaning the steps are publicly available.
- 38 Qualifications Wales receives an annual budget from the Welsh Government. This funds annual activity in the business plan and is, by association, linked with the medium- and longer-term ambitions through the three horizons model.
- 39 Qualifications Wales is also working to improve its longer-term resilience and manage ongoing financial pressures. This includes deploying staff flexibly to deliver key activities over the next three to five years. It is also considering how it can become more efficient by improving ways of working and exploring income generation opportunities.

⁸ Section 7 of the Act requires public bodies to set out 'the steps the public body proposes to take to meet those objectives' in their well-being statements.

- 40 Qualifications Wales established a task and finish group to start the work of embedding the Act. The group developed an implementation plan for 2024-25, to accompany the corporate plan. The implementation plan set out initial actions across corporate functions – including risk, assets, and workforce – to enable progress towards the well-being objectives.⁹ Qualifications Wales has since set up a Strategic Priorities Delivery Group to continue driving forward effective implementation (see **paragraph 43**).
- 41 Qualifications Wales’ corporate plan describes how it intends to work with various partners to deliver its well-being objectives. This includes Medr. The two bodies are meeting regularly and developing a Memorandum of Understanding.

Monitoring

Qualifications Wales has identified success criteria for its well-being objectives but has not yet defined which indicators it might use to report performance

- 42 Qualifications Wales monitors whether it is on track in delivering the steps set out in its business plan. The Board receives bi-monthly reports of progress. This is then summarised in Qualifications Wales’ annual report, with narrative describing what has been delivered. The Board also conducts an annual review of progress against the well-being objectives.
- 43 The Strategic Priorities Delivery Group meets quarterly and is tasked with monitoring progress against the well-being objectives. The executive team and other key staff attend. The group also supports the Board’s annual review of the objectives, and the preparation of Qualifications Wales’ annual report.

⁹ The [statutory guidance](#) for the Act describes such corporate functions and their role in promoting the change the Act is seeking to achieve.

- 44 Qualifications Wales has identified success criteria, that it calls 'dimensions', to aid its review of progress against the well-being objectives. One such dimension is 'Qualifications enable progression – in life, learning and work'.
- 45 Qualifications Wales included various sources of information against the dimensions to inform the Board's review of the objectives in January 2026. It also described certain information that could be used in future. Some information related to indicators that are within its direct control. Other information related to the wider qualifications system but provided useful context.
- 46 However, it is not yet clear which indicators Qualifications Wales will use to understand its own progress and impact as part of its formal performance reporting over time. Reporting the right performance information will help Qualifications Wales capture and communicate the impact it is having on the well-being objectives, up to 2035. It could also help Qualifications Wales understand the effect of any changes in its operating model (see **paragraph 39**).
- 47 At the time of our evidence gathering Qualifications Wales had not carried out a formal 'lessons learned' exercise on how it set its well-being objectives. Qualifications Wales plans to use the findings of our report to do this. Staff we spoke to reflected that the approach Qualifications Wales took to setting its objectives worked well.

Recommendations

R1 Qualifications Wales should extend its consideration of other bodies' objectives and how they relate to its own objectives. We recognise it will need to take a proportionate view of how it does this, though relevant bodies would include local authorities and Medr (see **paragraph 33**).

Qualifications Wales should do this when next setting its well-being objectives, and as part of the review of current well-being objectives in the interim.

R2 Qualifications Wales should build on the work it has done to develop its 'dimensions' by exploring measures and indicators it could use to assess and report on its performance over time. This should help it capture the impact it is having against its well-being objectives (see **paragraphs 46**).

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Qualifications Wales must set and publish well-being objectives that are designed to maximise its contribution to achieving each of the national well-being goals.

The Auditor General must examine the extent to which Qualifications Wales has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives. The Act requires an examination of this nature at least once in a specified reporting period. The current reporting period ends in May 2029.

We examined how Qualifications Wales went about setting its first well-being objectives, which it did between January 2023 and June 2024. We gathered and analysed our evidence between September 2025 and January 2026.

This was a relatively high-level review. Our main focus was on the process leading up to the publication of the objectives. We have considered corporate and financial planning in so far as they relate to how Qualifications Wales developed its well-being objectives and began planning for their delivery. We have not assessed the overall effectiveness of Qualifications Wales' corporate and financial planning.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

In carrying out this work, we explored the following:

- Was the process Qualifications Wales put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?

- Has Qualifications Wales considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
- Has Qualifications Wales put in place arrangements to monitor progress, learn, and continue improving how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?

Criteria

We used audit criteria to inform our assessment. The audit criteria describe what good looks like and cover each of the sustainable development principle's five ways of working. They are based on the positive indicators we have previously used in our sustainable development principle examinations. We developed these indicators through engagement with public bodies and informed by advice and guidance from the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

Methods

We reviewed a range of documents. This included Qualifications Wales' corporate plan and well-being statement, evidence that has informed its thinking on the well-being objectives, other key plans, and minutes of key meetings.

We also interviewed a sample of senior staff and others who had been directly involved in the process of developing the well-being objectives.

2 Key terms in this report

Term	Description
The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015	The Act places a duty on public bodies to carry out sustainable development, which is defined as ‘the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals’.
Sustainable development principle	<p>The Act defines the sustainable development principle as acting in a manner ‘which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’.</p> <p>The sustainable development principle is made up of five ways of working:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term • Integration • Involvement • Collaboration • Prevention
Long term	The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
Integration	The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.
Involvement	The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and

ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

Collaboration

Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.

Prevention

How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

National well-being goals

The Act sets out seven well-being goals. The Act makes it clear public bodies must work to achieve all of the goals, not just one or two.

National indicators

to measure the progress towards achieving the well-being goals at a national level, rather than the performance of individual public bodies.

Well-being objectives – and steps to meet them

Public bodies must set and publish well-being objectives that are designed to maximise their contribution to achieving each of the well-being goals.

They must also take all reasonable steps (in exercising their functions) to meet those objectives.

Well-being statements

When publishing well-being objectives, public bodies must also publish a well-being statement. Well-being statements must include certain information. Among other things, this includes:

- why a body considers that meeting the objectives will contribute to the achievement of the well-being goals; and
- the steps a body proposes to take to meet those objectives.

**Future Generations
Commissioner for
Wales**

The general duty of the Commissioner is to promote the sustainable development principle. In particular, to act as a guardian of the ability of future generations to meet their needs and encourage public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impact of the things that they do. The Commissioner's [website](#) provides more information about their work.

About us

The Auditor General for Wales is independent of the Welsh Government and the Senedd. The Auditor General's role is to examine and report on the accounts of the Welsh Government, the NHS in Wales and other related public bodies, together with those of councils and other local government bodies. The Auditor General also reports on these organisations' use of resources and suggests ways they can improve.

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