

**14 June 2023**

## **Qualifications Wales**

### **Care of Ms Claire Roberts**

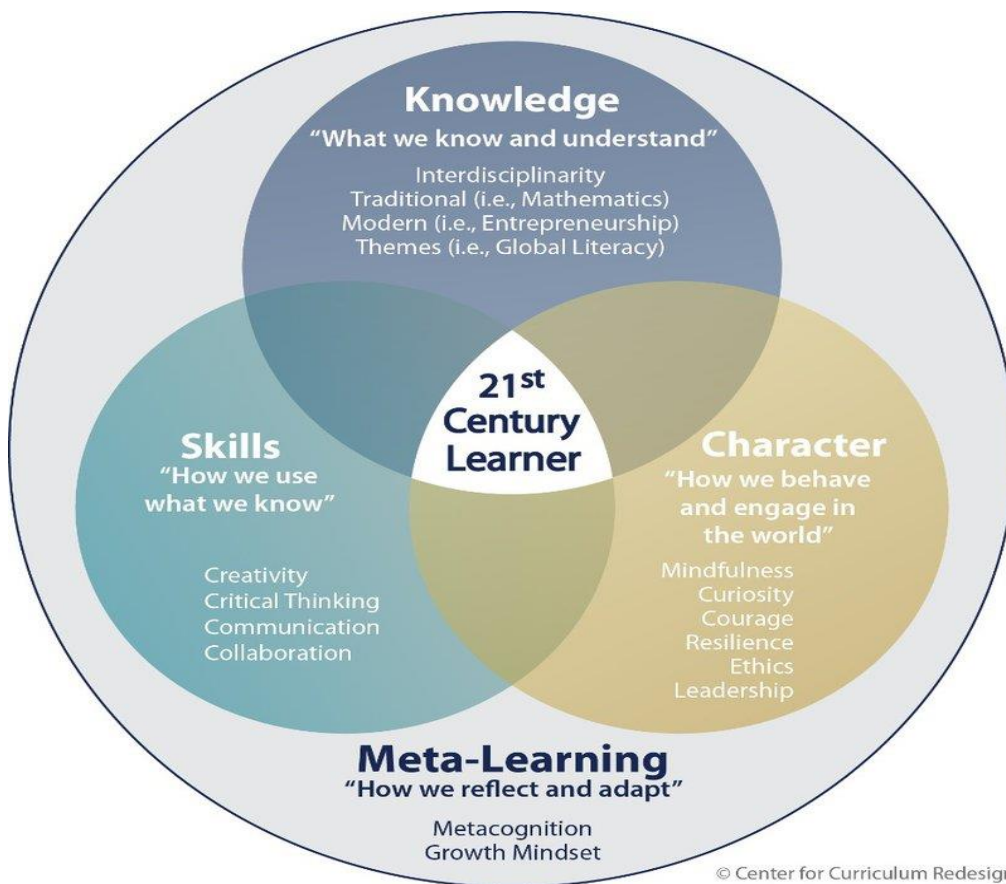
#### **UCU Cymru Response to the Full 14 to 16 Qualification Offer**

The University and College Union (UCU Cymru) represents almost 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, IT staff, librarians, and postgraduates in universities, colleges, adult education and training organisations across Wales. UCU Cymru is a politically autonomous but integral part of UCU, the largest post-school union in the world.

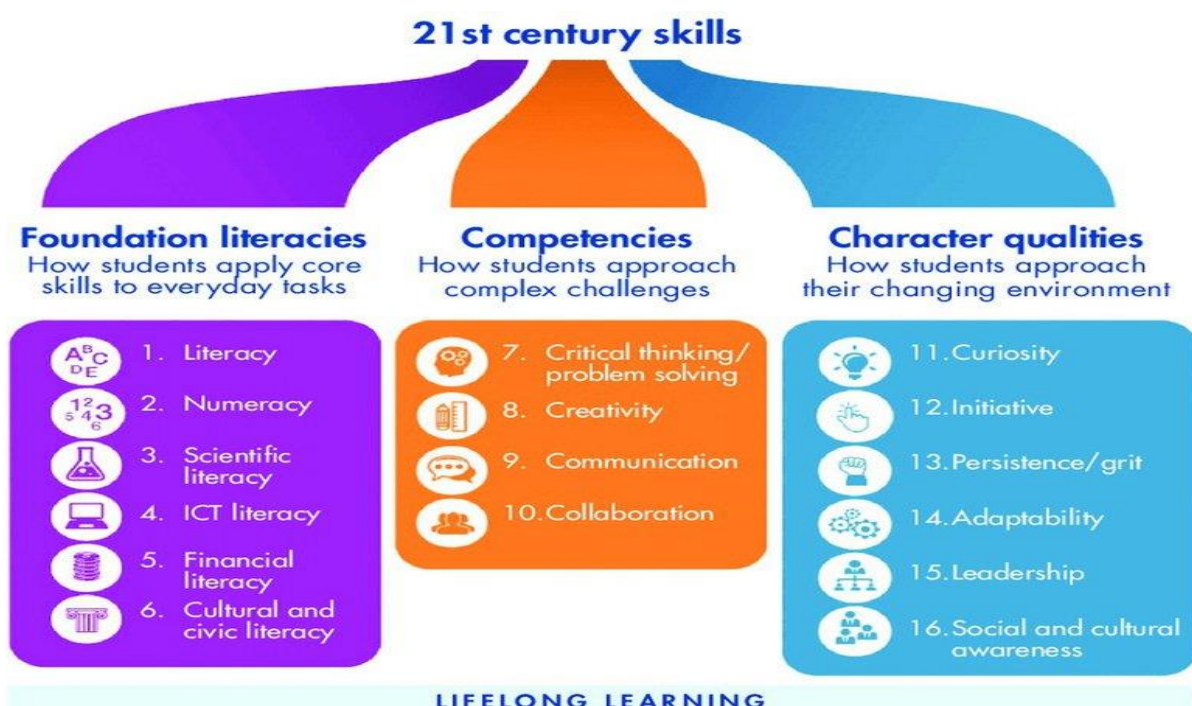
**1. Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed qualifications will support schools to deliver the Curriculum for Wales? & 2. Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed qualifications will help learners to progress in life, learning and work?**

UCU Cymru enthusiastically welcomes the broad thrust of these proposals but identifies an opportunity to take them further.

We consider it a priority that, in addition to knowledge, learners should also be equipped with the competencies, capabilities and habits of mind to [progress](#) into higher and further education or employment. Furthermore, if Wales wishes to foster a culture of life-long learning then it is essential that students possess the habits of curiosity, critical thinking and independent enquiry – dispositions which support meta learning. To that end, many UCU Cymru HE members have remarked upon the need to make improvements in this area – an observation reflected in the finding of Qualifications Wales's own sector review around the [Importance of Engineering](#) (at paragraph 87).



Departing from a position of critical positivity, UCU Cymru locates the Full Offer as an occasion to embed a more expansive range of foundational literacies, competencies and character qualities (abbreviated as learning dispositions). Whilst the distinction between learning dispositions and 'skills' might initially seem no more than semantic, we accept [evidence](#) indicating how the former can contribute to support lifelong learning. Professor Bill Lucas's submission to the 2023 House of Lords Education for 11–16 Year Olds Select Committee Inquiry encapsulates much of our thinking in relation to the full offer and proposed GCSE's. Consequently, we request that Qualifications Wales consider it in some detail.



European Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, 2007	Pellegrino and Hilton, 2012	Gutman and Schoon, 2013	Heckman and Kautz, 2013	Lamb et al., 2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication in mother tongue</li> <li>• Communication in foreign languages</li> <li>• Digital competence</li> <li>• Learning to learn</li> <li>• Social and civic competences</li> <li>• Sense of initiative &amp; entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Cultural awareness &amp; expression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical thinking</li> <li>• Information literacy</li> <li>• Reasoning</li> <li>• Innovation</li> <li>• Intellectual openness</li> <li>• Work ethic</li> <li>• Conscientiousness</li> <li>• Positivity</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Perseverance</li> <li>• Self-control</li> <li>• Metacognitive strategies</li> <li>• Social competencies</li> <li>• Resilience &amp; coping</li> <li>• Creativity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perseverance</li> <li>• Self-control</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Attentiveness</li> <li>• Self-esteem &amp; self efficacy</li> <li>• Resilience to adversity</li> <li>• Openness to experience</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Humility</li> <li>• Tolerance of diverse opinions</li> <li>• Engaging productively in society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical thinking</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Metacognition</li> <li>• Problem-solving</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Self-efficacy</li> <li>• Conscientiousness</li> <li>• Perseverance</li> </ul>
Table 1. Dispositions for a lifetime of learning (Lucas, 2019)				

Moreover, we identify a positive equity dividend where project work is socially rooted and orientated towards collaborative learning. Put simply, collaborative co-pedagogies render social capital diffuse and commonly held. Consequently, and as observed by [Michael Fullan](#);

“In implementing deep learning in scores of settings, we began to see that under the right conditions immersive learning reaches everyone. It was this realisation that led us to the ‘equity hypothesis’ referred to above: *Deep learning is good for all but is especially effective for those most disconnected from schooling*” (Page 5, Corwin 2018).

Not only does this auger relief for the ‘[forgotten third](#)’ of learners who currently fail to achieve a GCSE C grade but also opens the way to enhancing a positive experience of school. As many of our adult educators will attest, this can make all the difference in terms of educational take-up in later life. As things stand, it is worth noting that some of these same UCU members are employing trauma-informed pedagogies to address the severe emotional and psychological scarring which can result from perceived educational failure. Given the transformational role that education plays, UCU Cymru considers it a great iniquity that any child should leave school with a lifelong dread of learning. To that end, we have great hopes for these qualifications if they are done properly.

## 5. Is there anything else we need to think about regarding our overall proposals?

Previously, discussions around deep learning have all too often been framed in a transactional narrative whereby the ambitions of authenticity and equity have been seen to compete with validity, portability and trust & confidence. Moreover, the reality of a weary profession confronting a reform rich environment threatens a further bottleneck. UCU Cymru has consistently argued that both the new qualifications and curriculum which they serve will both fail unless government takes bold steps to support genuine professional learning and communities of practice. As a positive lead, the findings of UCU Cymru's joint Welsh Government funded [Action Research Project](#) will provide one possible template for successful collaborative practise.

Happily, UCU Cymru has identified an existing, novel qualification which appears to address many of these challenges.

Emerging from England, the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ - see attachments) embeds the learning dispositions favoured by UCU Cymru whilst also offering a truly game changing opportunity for civic engagement/co-creation with HEI's, business and a range of stakeholders. Borrowing from what is good in Singapore, there is an obvious advantage in engaging institutions and employers whose trust and confidence will ultimately underwrite the value of most qualifications. Moreover, aside from providing the PCET sector with a valuable occasion to perform its civic mission/strategic duty to achieve curricula coherency, the EPQ and associated School Citizen Assemblies can also augment the movement towards community schools.

Quoting directly from the Edge Foundation report (attached), some of the benefits are summarised as:

- Develop universities and schools as hubs who can engage with local organisations and communities to make a real difference through education and social action.
- Tackle problems of environmental sustainability and climate change by bringing together schools, climate change experts, young people and communities to enact change within their local communities.
- Encourage greater agency, creativity, inclusivity and empathy of different stakeholder perspectives through approaches such as challenge led learning and other innovative pedagogies and practices.
- Promote equity, equality and diversity by creating spaces for different voices and perspectives around social justice issues and climate change.
- Embed greater levels of knowledge, skills, higher order thinking, empathy, collaboration, creativity and real-life problem solving into curriculum design and pedagogies within schools and universities.

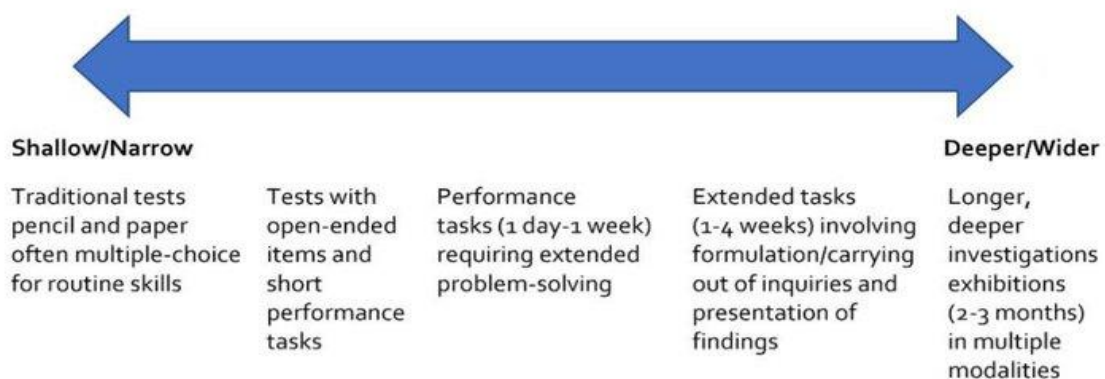
- Develop templates, toolkits, platforms and prototypes that can be scaled up nationally (and internationally) to support and empower change and encourage processes of civic and community engagement, learning, collaboration.

Having attached the Edge Foundation Report, we strongly recommend that Qualifications Wales considers the document in detail. Similarly, following an opportunity to meet with Dr Christine Maclean, Manchester University, to explore the EPQ in detail (including how it is assessed), we have also attached several slides and resources. We hope that these will provide a deeper insight around how the qualification works in practice.

**As a concrete proposal, UCU Cymru would like to facilitate a meeting between Qualifications Wales, Dr Christine Maclean, Olly Newton (CEO – Edge Foundation) and Professor Bill Lucas (Winchester University and Rethinking Assessment).**

Acknowledging that the EPQ might not be fit for direct Welsh import, we believe that there is a great deal to be learnt from the approach which it adopts. Furthermore, the fact that a (what we are led to believe) unique project-based qualification is already being 'road tested' offers an excellent chance to learn lessons and avoid replication.

It is also worth mentioning that we do not see these lessons as simply being restricted to project qualifications. As recently outlined in a separate discussion paper, it is our conviction that rapid developments in artificial intelligence necessitates an urgent conversation around the future of assessment. Drawing on Professor Lucas's paradigm of a narrow-to-deep learning continuum, the NEA element in the new GCSE's can be harnessed to position future-proofed, multimodal assessment beyond the reach of AI. UCU Cymru contrasts this with a drearier dependency on individuation which will not only increase teacher workload but also fail to guard against AI generated responses, subsequently learned by rote – the absurd yet inevitable destination for any assessment regime built around coaching, memory testing and fact retention.



**In short, UCU Cymru believes that the proposed qualifications provide a crucial opportunity to embed the dispositions necessary to support lifelong meta-learning. We identify the EPQ as an interesting, advanced project from which the regulator and wider sector can learn. To that end, UCU Cymru offers to arrange a meeting through which the qualification's applicability and import can be usefully explored.**