

Qualifications Wales supports learners with flexible, user-focused system

New stand-alone qualifications system improves information sharing and collaboration

Qualifications Wales is the independent regulator for non-degree qualifications in Wales. Since it began operations in 2015, the organisation aims to ensure that qualifications and the Welsh qualification system are effective in meeting learners' needs and to promote public confidence.

The 70-strong team at Qualifications Wales are passionate about ensuring that qualifications are valid, reliable, high-quality and comparable with equivalent qualifications and jurisdictions. With main activities centred on policy and research, approval of qualifications for public funding and monitoring its recognised exam boards, the regulator has a strong focus on supporting learners and external stakeholders. This means it's important that information about qualifications is easy to access and understand.

To deliver on this and provide a high-quality customer experience to its users, Qualifications Wales needed a brand new stand-alone qualifications database to replace a legacy system that was populated from the English regulation database.

Outcomes

- Improved responsiveness by Qualifications Wales to awarding bodies
- Better visibility of work in progress
- The reliable provision of relevant and accurate qualifications data to stakeholders
- The QiW system was a finalist in the 2016 UK IT Industry Awards in the Best Not-for-profit Project category.

Delivering an essential system

Alison Standfast, Executive Director Finance and Corporate Services, has a very clear vision for the way Qualifications Wales delivers its service. "We want technology to help our customers and stakeholders work with us, not act as a barrier or a cause of delays" she explains. "As a new organisation parting company with a legacy system, we had the opportunity to create a system that is simple and intuitive to use, easy to update and to search, and that adds to public confidence."

Key outcomes:

- 1 | 9,000+ users in first six months
- 2 | Faster searching ability
- 3 | Stakeholder confidence

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To develop this new bi-lingual Qualifications in Wales (QiW) portal within a challenging timescale, the regulator selected digital transformation expert Civica as its delivery partner.

“This was a mission-critical system which had to be ready to accept direct input from exam boards before the English database was expected to be replaced in March 2016. We chose to develop this system using agile methods and needed a partner who could not only deliver quickly and effectively, but also work from a base of established experience. Civica gave us confidence that they had the right experience to complete the task successfully and I’m pleased to say that the Civica and Qualifications Wales teams worked extremely well together. Civica handled the brief in a highly professional way, maintaining a constant dialogue with our staff to ensure the project stayed on track and was delivered on time.”

The solution

At the heart of the QiW solution sits an application that supports the management lifecycle of ‘approved’ and ‘designated’ general and vocational qualifications in Wales. It is a public-facing, bilingual system that provides information about qualifications which are eligible for public funding in Wales. The system holds relevant regulatory information, such as details about a qualification’s size and assessment structure, as well as Welsh Government information about performance points linked to the schools performance categorisation.

User-defined collaboration

QiW enables Awarding Bodies to submit qualifications data directly into the system using a web interface. It then manages the workflow and business rules to enable each qualification record to proceed through the relevant process. As the system is used by a large number of external parties, gaining their engagement and support was crucial to the project’s success.

Civica and Qualifications Wales conducted a number of workshops with external stakeholders, gaining valuable feedback sufficiently early in development cycles to make a difference. Stakeholders were engaged early and often.

Scalable and flexible

The Civica team built the QiW solution on the Microsoft Azure cloud infrastructure, using technologies including ASP.NET, MVC, SQL Server, Power BI, Azure Web Apps and Azure Web Jobs. The team configured an auto-scaling environment, enabling the system to cope with peaks in usage demand and scaling down cost during times of low usage. The modern development environment, coupled with industry best-practice techniques used by the Civica team, resulted in a superior system that is flexible and easy to extend.

Migration and integration

The Civica team worked alongside Qualifications Wales to identify and document the mappings between the legacy and new data structure. They migrated more than 11,500 live records from the legacy system into a highly performant, virtualised data warehouse.

Analytics and insights

QiW provides powerful reporting and analytical capabilities. It enables management to receive information on the status and progress of qualification submissions, and allows the approvals team to better manage the consideration of these qualifications for approval or designation.

Business processes and training

The Civica and Qualifications Wales teams worked closely together to understand the extent of changes required that were brought about by the extended capabilities of the new system. Time was invested in training users and working with the Qualifications Wales in-house developer, so that the organisation is able to remain self-sufficient going forward.



QiW project manager Tania Deitch was responsible for managing the delivery of the project and was at the frontline of ensuring a successful agile delivery for Qualifications Wales. “Civica really hit the ground running, and were able to grasp the essential concepts of the system within a very short time. They quickly embedded our organisational style, and worked very much as partners with us throughout the whole project, enabling open, flexible and productive discussion and development from the start. We developed our intended functions on time, and were delighted to release the product to our stakeholders on our due date without any hitches.”

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