

Answers to the Written Assembly Questions for answer on 18 December 2009

[R] signifies that the Member has declared an interest.

[W] signifies that the question was tabled in Welsh.

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To ask the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Leanne Wood (South Wales Central): With reference to the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Transforming Education and Training Provision' agenda, will the Minister outline the process by which Strategic Outline Programmes and Strategic Outline Cases are evaluated within the Welsh Assembly Government, and will the Minister state whether these evaluations are available for public scrutiny. (WAQ55312)

Answer issued on 19 January 2010

In line with the requirements of the Transformation Policy, Learning Partnerships submitted outline proposals to Assembly Government officials in either January or March 2009. These proposals were individually appraised by the relevant Assembly Government Area Teams and a range of policy officials.

In this way outline proposals were not only appraised against the criteria published in the Transformation Policy but were also considered in terms of alignment with other all other relevant Assembly Government policies and programmes. All appraisal outcomes were discussed and approved at senior officer level and Learning Partnerships were subsequently informed of any shortcomings.

As more detailed plans are developed and submitted, the procedures outlined will continue to be followed, with the additional requirement to secure approval from the Assembly Government Strategic Capital Investment Board where requests for significant capital investment are being made.

In terms of evaluations being subject to public scrutiny, any member of the public can make a request for any document held by the Welsh Assembly Government, and the information will be considered for released in line with our obligation under Freedom of Information.

Leanne Wood (South Wales Central): Will the Minister make a statement elaborating on how criterion (vii) - 'the positive effect that the proposal will have on the range and quality of Welsh-medium opportunities for learners' - contained within the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Transforming Education and Training Provision' agenda, should be interpreted. (WAQ55313)

Answer issued on 19 January 2010

In the policy, Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales, the Assembly Government set out a national framework to support the transformation of the provider network in Wales. It directs providers of post-compulsory education and training in Wales to set aside traditional, narrow, institutional arrangements and to plan provision collectively; direct more of the funding available to teaching and learning and learner support; and transform the network of providers such that a full range of learning options is made available for students at 14-19 in a way that prepares young people for the full range of pathways open to them.

In light of the individual culture and ethos of the parts of Wales, the transformation framework encourages stakeholders to develop local solutions to local needs rather than a one-size-fits all model across Wales. Consequently, the policy does not prescribe any one particular model.

The enhancement of Welsh language is integral to the delivery of the transformation agenda. Learning Partnership plans for transforming education and training will need to demonstrate improvements in amount and range of Welsh-medium provision available through learning network reconfiguration within local authority areas, or across local authority boundaries where appropriate. They should show clear post-16 and post-18 progression routes and options through the medium of Welsh and those that can be accessed bilingually in further education, Work Based Learning and school sixth form provision, as appropriate.

The delivery of Welsh-medium education, in both an urban and rural settings, will be fully considered when agreeing local and sectoral plans for transformation. Whilst the policy is not prescriptive in terms of the model that may be adopted, local authorities and other learning providers are expected to take account of the requirement to further develop Welsh-medium provision in the context of the Welsh Medium Education Strategy and the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure. It is recognised that this will represent a significant challenge for some local authorities, particularly in rural areas.

The potential impact of transformation proposals on Welsh-medium provision has been fully assessed during the appraisal procedures applied to proposals by Assembly Government Officials. As proposals are subsequently developed into more detailed plans, Assembly Government officials will ensure that providers and local authorities take appropriate steps to secure improvements in the number and types of learning programmes available through the medium of Welsh.

Leanne Wood (South Wales Central): Will the Minister make a statement on the Welsh Assembly Government's draft Welsh-Medium Education Strategy, specifically on those parts relating to the difference in learner outcomes between Welsh-Medium courses delivered in institutions whose day-to-day language is English and the outcomes of those courses delivered through an all-round Welsh-Medium education in an institution that operates through the medium of Welsh. (WAQ55314)

Answer issued on 19 January 2010

The draft Welsh-medium Education Strategy refers briefly to the introduction of some Welsh-medium provision into English-medium schools. The possible advantages of raising standards in Welsh second language by this method would have to be weighed against the disadvantages that such provision does not necessarily produce fluent speakers of Welsh, may not be sustainable over time, and could undermine Welsh-medium schools which provide a more holistic Welsh-medium experience.

Reference is also made to the need for pupils from non-Welsh-speaking homes to receive full immersion in the language (i.e. through Welsh-medium education) if they are to become fluent and confident Welsh-speakers. It is generally accepted that at least 70% of curricular time should be through the medium of Welsh if such pupils are to acquire a sound command of the language in a broad range of skills.

The different linguistic outcomes which can result from provision taking place in 'bilingual' settings is discussed in the draft Strategy. Some of these may lead to fluency, but others may not always ensure that an individual becomes fluent and confident in both languages.

The Context and Considerations paper accompanying the draft Strategy refers to a risk that some proposals for restructuring post-16 provision, under the Transformation agenda, such as the establishment of tertiary colleges, could potentially undermine existing strengths in the delivery of Welsh-medium education. Proposals for transforming provision should be developed to improve the extent and range of Welsh-medium opportunities for learners. It is also important that the wider Transformation agenda is developed under conditions that recognise the specific needs of the Welsh-medium sector.

Leanne Wood (South Wales Central): Will the Minister make a statement on whether the Rhondda Cynon Taf's preferred option for transformation, involving the closure of every 6th Form across the Authority and the creation of a single 'bilingual' tertiary system, complies with the evaluation criteria set out in 'Transforming Education and Training Provision'. (WAQ55315)

Answer issued on 19 January 2010

I will write to you and a copy of the letter will be placed on the internet.

To ask the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Jeff Cuthbert (Caerphilly): Will the Minister provide an update on what grant aid is available from the Welsh Assembly Government to local authorities to assist with architectural fees prior to planning permission being granted. (WAQ55311)

Answer issued on 21 December 2009

The Welsh Assembly Government does not provide grant aid to local authorities to assist with architectural fees prior to planning permission being granted. However, local authorities can, and usually do, provide advice to members of the public prior to submission of an application.