

## **Answers to the Written Assembly Questions for answer on 29 September 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***

**David Melding (South Wales Central):** What assessment has been made of the effect on pupils with learning difficulties sitting the examination-only maths, GCSE, and will the Minister make a statement. (WAQ54836)

***Answer issued on 29 September 2009***

GCSE is a UK-wide qualification. The regulators in Wales, England and Northern Ireland have together undertaken equalities impact assessments on GCSE and have produced 'inclusion sheets' which focus on actions to minimise the barriers to disabled learners.

Access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and exemptions policies are in place to overcome barriers, and awarding bodies have been informed they should apply these in their new specifications development for 2010.

Access Arrangements, for example readers, scribes, extra time and supervised rest breaks, are designed to allow learners with special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries to access the assessment. They allow these learners to show what they know and can do without changing the demands of the assessment.

**David Melding (South Wales Central):** Are there any proposals to broaden the assessment procedures for Maths at GCSE, and will the Minister make a statement. (WAQ54837)

***Answer issued on 29 September 2009***

No. The regulatory agreement across Wales, England and N Ireland is that assessments in GCSE for all subjects are externally set and are normally written examinations, except when the skills being assessed in a subject cannot be validly assessed in that way. You will, doubtless, recall the extensive public and professional debate on the uses and abuses of coursework that led to the current regulations. In mathematics, following national consultation, it has been agreed that assessment be fully by externally-set written examinations.

GCSE is, of course, not the only qualification at this level and Wales has actively encouraged the use of Key Skills both generally and specifically in Application of Number. This is a portfolio based assessment and a requirement within the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. The successor to Key Skills – Essential Skills Wales – will similarly have a portfolio based system of assessment.

**Ann Jones (Vale of Clwyd):** What is the Welsh Assembly Government doing to widen participation in higher education in Wales. (WAQ54842)

***Answer issued on 30 September 2009.***

The Assembly Government has long held widening access as a high priority and will continue to do so in the future as a core aspect of its drive for social justice.

I agree wholeheartedly with the Jones Report's promotion of the value of higher education on the lives and well being of individuals and communities. I want to inspire more people to aspire to higher education, and champion those for whom this will be a completely new venture.

As part of this I will work with colleagues and officials to pursue further engagement of HE institutions with further education colleges and other skills providers in delivering the transformation agenda in Wales.

I am pleased to note that the Jones report specifically referred to the important role of Foundation Degrees and of further education institutions in their delivery and I am keen to promote the uptake of this qualification and its important role in addressing technician level and management skills in Wales, as well as making it more possible for more people to achieve higher level skills. The report suggested that the delivery and awarding of Foundation Degrees should be by whoever is best placed to offer the appropriate level, nature and quality of provision. I support this concept and the Assembly Government is already working to develop a strategic policy on the delivery of Foundation Degrees.

We are already taking action to tackle the disparity in access in the Heads of the Valleys, where new HE provision will commence this calendar year. The collaborative project to develop HE provision in the Heads of the Valleys is a major step in widening access in this location, and a key model of collaboration to widen access and raise the skills base. I hope that this initiative can become a model of collaboration between the higher and further education sectors for the benefit of local communities.

The student support measures announced following Phase 1 of the review represent a key part of our work approach to promoting wider and fairer access to higher education. In response to its proposals for a revised student finance system, include the redirecting of resources from the Tuition Fee Grant to help widen participation through an enhanced Assembly Learning Grant for students from low income households.

I will also wish to see a revised approach to a National Bursary Framework for Wales, my third critical priority, to help with access and retention of students. My officials are currently exploring options but the underlying principle is of a framework which delivers support on a fair and consistent basis for those in need.

An important aspect of the widening access agenda highlighted in Professor Jones's report is the availability and use of the Welsh language in our HE institutions and I welcome the report's endorsement of the Coleg Ffederal model, the fourth of my priorities, to provide a step change in Welsh medium provision, a key One Wales commitment.

In Wales, our general challenge is not to persuade individuals with good qualifications to go on to higher education – they already do - but to ensure that more young people with talent and ability can gain the qualifications they require to be 'university ready'. On most indicators, Welsh HEIs outperform UK averages in attracting a wide social mix of students.

Widening access to higher education is one of the key themes of Reaching Higher, and an extra £2 million has been made available to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales' four Reaching Wider Partnerships for widening access activities each year since 2002-03. The focus for the Reaching Wider Partnerships has been on attracting and retaining students from low income backgrounds (identified by postal code), ethnic minorities, students with disabilities and mature students. The Partnerships are engaged in a wide range of projects designed to promote higher education to those whose families and communities have no tradition of going on to university.

### ***To ask the Minister for Health and Social Services***

**Alun Cairns (South Wales West):** Will the Minister list the individual overspend and underspend of Social Services Departments across Wales as of the 1st of September. (WAQ54838)

### ***Answer issued on 29 September 2009***

Information on the overspend and underspend of Social Services Departments across Wales is not held centrally.

***To ask the Minister for Rural Affairs***

**Mick Bates (Montgomeryshire):** How many licences for the destruction of badgers have been issued in the past 2 years. (WAQ54840)

***Answer issued 30 September 2009***

No licences for the destruction of badgers have been issued by the Welsh Assembly Government in the last 2 years.

Badgers and their sett are fully protected under The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 . However, The Welsh Assembly Government has authority under Section 10(2) and (3) of the Act to :

- a) interfere with badger setts for:
  - i) the purpose of any agricultural or forestry operation;
  - ii) the purpose of any operation to maintain or improve any existing watercourse or drainage works, or to construct new works required for the drainage of land, including works of defence against seawater or tidal water; and
  - iii) controlling foxes in order to protect livestock and penned game.
- b) kill or take badgers or to interfere with their setts for:
  - i) the purpose of preventing the spread of disease\*; and
  - ii) the purpose of preventing serious damage to land, crops, poultry or any other form of property.

**Mick Bates (Montgomeryshire):** How many licences for the removal of badgers have been issued in the past 2 years. (WAQ54841)

***Answer issued on 30 September 2009***

No licenses for the removal of badgers have been issued by the Welsh Assembly Government in the past 2 years.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 fully protects badgers and their setts. However, The Welsh Assembly Government has authority under Section 10(2) and (3) of the Act to :

- a)interfere with badger setts for:
  - i) the purpose of any agricultural or forestry operation;
  - ii) the purpose of any operation to maintain or improve any existing watercourse or drainage works, or to construct new works required for the drainage of land, including works of defence against seawater or tidal water; and
  - iii) controlling foxes in order to protect livestock and penned game.
- b) kill or take badgers or to interfere with their setts for:
  - i) the purpose of preventing the spread of disease\*; and
  - ii) the purpose of preventing serious damage to land, crops, poultry or any other form of property.

93 licenses have been issued in the past 2 years to interfere with badger setts.