

National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill: Summary of changes made at Stage 2

Introduction

This document sets out the main changes made to the **National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill** ('the Bill') during Stage 2 proceedings.

Background

The Bill was introduced by the Assembly Commissioner responsible for the Welsh language, Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM, ("the Commissioner") on 30 January 2012 and subsequently referred by the Business Committee to the **Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee** ("the Committee") for Stage 1 scrutiny. The Committee published its Stage 1 report on **8 May 2012**.

The Bill was approved unanimously at Stage 1 by the Assembly following a debate on its general principles in plenary on **16 May 2012**. A financial resolution in relation to the Bill was subsequently agreed by Members in plenary on **22 May 2012**.

Stage 2 proceedings commenced on 17 May 2012. A total of 23 amendments were tabled (7 of which were tabled by the Assembly Commission). The Committee considered and disposed of the amendments at its meeting on 21 June 2012.

Amendments passed at Stage 2

A total of 9 amendments were passed by the Committee during Stage 2 proceedings. A further 9 were either withdrawn or not moved during the meeting before a vote could take place; 2 were rejected and 3 were withdrawn ahead of the debate. The main changes made to the Bill by the amendments passed are included below:

Record of Assembly Proceedings

- Amendment 1, tabled by the Commissioner, adds a requirement for the Assembly Commission to produce a fully bilingual record of the Assembly's plenary proceedings in both the Assembly's official languages. This duty does not extend to producing bilingual records of the Assembly's committee and sub-committee meetings. Amendments 2 and 3, also tabled by the Commissioner, are technical amendments consequential to amendment 1.

The Official Languages Scheme

- Amendment 4, tabled by the Commissioner, seeks to address concerns raised by the Committee in its report and adds five new elements that an Official Languages Scheme ("the Scheme") must contain. These include:
 - measures relating to public engagement with the Assembly;
 - the setting of targets and timescales within the Scheme;
 - the allocation of responsibilities to allow for the Scheme's implementation;
 - a means of measuring progress in implementing the Scheme; and
 - a strategy for ensuring that Assembly staff have the language skills necessary to ensure the Scheme's implementation.
- Amendment 5, tabled by the Commissioner, removes subparagraph 2(6) from the Bill.
- Amendment 16, tabled by Aled Roberts, replaces the words "relating to" with "for" in subparagraph 2(5) in Section 2.
- Amendment 17, tabled by Aled Roberts, requires the Scheme to include provisions for simultaneous translation in all plenary, committee and sub-committee proceedings.

Reviewing the Official Languages Scheme

- Amendments 6 and 7, tabled by the Commissioner, replaces the requirement for the Assembly Commission to review the Scheme every five years with a requirement that such reviews take place as soon as reasonably practicable following a Welsh General Election, as recommended by the Committee.

Commitments made by the

During Stage 2 proceedings, the Commissioner made commitments to consider the issues raised by 8 amendments. All these amendments were subsequently either withdrawn or not moved by the Members concerned ahead of a vote in light of the assurances given by the Commissioner at the meeting to discuss these issues further ahead of the Stage 3 debate. Details of these amendments are included below:

An official responsible for the Welsh language

- Amendment 11, tabled by Bethan Jenkins, sought to create a post in the Assembly Commission with responsibility for implementing the Bill's provisions.

The Official Languages Scheme

- Amendment 18, tabled by Aled Roberts, sought to require that simultaneous translation would be provided at all public meetings taking place on the Assembly estate, and not just at plenary, committee and sub-committee meetings.
- Amendment 20, tabled by Aled Roberts, sought to ensure that members of the public would be able to interact with the Assembly in their choice of either of the official languages.
- Amendment 21, tabled by Aled Roberts, sought to ensure that a programme to nurture the continual improvement of the internal use of Welsh in the Assembly would be provided in the Scheme.
- Amendment 4A, tabled by Bethan Jenkins, sought to

remove the words "subject to any exceptions identified in the Scheme" from the wording included in amendment 4, which was passed by the Committee at Stage 2 on 22 May 2012..

- Amendment 12, tabled by Bethan Jenkins, sought to require that research documents prepared by the Assembly Commission for the use of AMs in Assembly proceedings would be provided in both official languages.

Annual reporting arrangements

- Amendment 14, tabled by Suzy Davies, sought to require that the Assembly Commission's statutory annual report should include specific references to the measures outlined in subparagraph (5) of the Bill (which outlines what the Scheme must include).

Consultation

- Amendment 15, tabled by Suzy Davies, sought to ensure that the Assembly Commission would not be able to publish an Official Languages Scheme unless it had consulted with "such parties as the Assembly Commission considers appropriate".

Next steps

A revised version of the Bill has been prepared and is available on the **Bill's web page**. A revised Explanatory Memorandum will also be prepared and published in due course. Stage 3 began on 22 June 2012 (the day after Stage 2 proceedings were completed). Members may table their amendments through the Legislation Office (legislationoffice@wales.gov.uk). The Stage 3 debate will take place early in the autumn term.

Further information

For further information in relation to the Bill, please contact the Clerk, Gareth Williams (gareth.williams@wales.gov.uk) or Owain Roberts in the Research Service (owain.roberts@wales.gov.uk)