

Answers issued to Members on 29 October 2008

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

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

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Questions to the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

David Melding (South Wales Central): Will the minister make a statement on what progress has been made to establish the National Advisory Board on advocacy services for children? (WAQ52658)

The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Hutt): The Welsh Assembly Government's aim is to make effective advocacy provision for all children and young people in Wales. The National Independent Advocacy Board will take a strategic view of advocacy services and make recommendations to WAG/NAW. The Board's key responsibilities are as follows.

- to take an independent, strategic overview of the development and delivery of advocacy services for children and young people in Wales and to make recommendations to NAFW and to Welsh Ministers accordingly;
- to advise on the regulatory framework for advocacy services with a view to ensuring the provision of effective advocacy services to children and young people in Wales;
- to promote best practice in the development of advocacy services and to identify and develop the evidence base;
- to advise Welsh Ministers on the commissioning arrangements for advocacy at national and local level and to publish an opinion on arrangements made by CYPP to commission and secure the provision of advocacy services at local and/ or regional level;
- to advise Welsh Ministers on the regulation and inspection framework for advocacy services and the workforce;
- to publish a progress report every three years on the delivery and effectiveness of advocacy services in Wales.

The appointment of the Independent Advocacy Board is proceeding through the Public Appointments process. We anticipate the board will be in place early in the New Year, in time to advise on the specification for the National Helpline and to advise on plans for commissioning advocacy services put forward by Children and Young People's Partnerships.

Janet Ryder (North Wales): Will the Minister provide a statement, county by county, of the use that is being made of additional funding for transition key workers and how each county is fulfilling its obligations? (WAQ52653)

Jane Hutt: I have made funding totalling £1.5m available for three years from 2008-09 to 2011/12 to support the development of a framework for the recruitment, training and support of a number of additional transition key worker posts to be made available across Wales. Following a competitive bidding process during which 17 multi-agency bids were received, funding has been allocated on a pilot project basis to projects across Wales namely Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Monmouthshire.

The projects vary in content and context but each bid was carefully assessed against specific criteria which asked for evidence of:

- how projects would identify and address the needs of young people with a disability and their families/carers through the provision of transition key workers;
- baseline data on numbers of disabled young people moving towards or in transition 14-25 years of age (a projection for the next 3-5 years);
- how they will seek and ensure the participation and involvement of young people with a disability and their families and carers in the development of transition key working;
- demonstrable outcome measures, inline with the National Service Framework, the SEN Code of Practice and other local indicators;

- how the key worker standards as a benchmarking and monitoring tool would be applied;
- the need to 'join up' the Early Support initiative with transition to provide a seamless key worker model from 0-25 years of age.

The progress of the pilot projects as well as the development of the support framework will be managed on our behalf by the Care Co-ordination Network UK (CCNUK) a Welsh Assembly Government funded networking organisation, who promote and support key working with disabled children.

I am confident that the additional key workers each project will provide, together with a robust support framework, will ensure that more families of children with SEN have access to high quality, key worker services during transition from school to work or into further education.

In March 2009, I will be hosting a joint Welsh Assembly Government/CCNUK conference which, as well as reporting on the progress of the pilot projects, will also focus on the principles of providing a seamless transition key worker service into adulthood, with an emphasis on person centred planning and the interface between children's and adults assessment processes.

The conference will also look at the training requirements/workforce development of both transition key workers and other professionals working with disabled young people.

Janet Ryder (North Wales): What assessment has been made of the way local authorities are co-ordination provision and planning for young people with an additional need at transition? (WAQ52654)

Jane Hutt: The SEN Code of Practice for Wales provides guidance for schools and LEAs in terms of planning and provision of all children with special educational needs through all key stages in school and as they move on from school to further education or employment.

Following the recommendations made in part three of the former Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's (ELLS) review of additional educational needs which focused specifically on transition, an External Transition Reference Group was established (in October 2007) to consider how transition planning could be improved for this group of particularly vulnerable children and young people.

This important work is currently being taken forward by a Transition Planning Process Sub Group and an ambitious action plan has been developed. Included within the plan is a review of the various strands of guidance and policy on transition planning with the express aim to bring it together into a simpler and more accessible way, which will then be disseminated as good practice to all relevant agencies. The sub-group has representation from all key stakeholder groups including parents and young people and in fact is jointly chaired by parents.

I will shortly be reporting progress on all 47 recommendations of the former ELLS Committee's review to the Enterprise and Learning Committee.

However, the need for better multi-agency co-ordinated planning and support for young people at this particular transition phase is also a key feature of other key reports including the Equality Opportunity Committee's report on Service Provision for Disabled Young People (January 2007) and, more recently, our wide ranging consultation on options for the reform of the statutory assessment and statementing framework.

Janet Ryder (North Wales): To what extent are pupils who are on 'school action' and 'school action plus' being afforded equal treatment to those who have a statement for special need? (WAQ52655)

Jane Hutt: Support for children with special needs is currently set out in the Education Act 1996 and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice for Wales (2002). The SEN Code of Practice for

Wales provides guidance for schools and LEAs on how to meet the needs of all children with SEN through a graduated response.

Having secured full legal competence in SEN, extended to include additional learning needs (ALN), we now aim to improve service provision and support for all children with ALN. However, prior to making any amendments to primary legislation officials have engaged in widespread informal consultation with all key stakeholders including parents, carers, professionals and voluntary agencies on options for the reform of the statutory assessment framework in Wales.

We have recently invited expressions of interest from LEAs to lead four pilot projects, in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government and other key stakeholders. The pilot schemes will cover the following four areas: quality assurance of ALN provision; the inter-disciplinary model for children and young people with severe & complex needs; the model for children and young people with less complex ALN (school action and school action plus) and the role of the ALN co-ordinator (ALNCo).

The aim is to develop and trial alternatives to the current statutory assessment system for all children and young people who are having their needs met via the graduated response. The pilot schemes will further develop the ideas and concepts arising from the former ELLS committee reports and the recent consultation, whilst continuing to build trust and consensus amongst parents, children and young people and other key stakeholders.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Janet Ryder (North Wales): Is the £3.6m being allocated for the Welsh Autism Strategy referred to by the Minister in the Western Mail on 15 October new, additional money to the £1.8m already ring fenced for the Strategy along with £1.7m from the Revenue Support Grant, and, if so, will the Minister state how this additional money will be spent? (WAQ52656)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Edwina Hart): The £3.6m referred to is the allocated combined budget provision for the Autism Strategy of £1.8m for each of the years 2008-09 and 2009-10. This is in addition to the £1.7m recurring in the Local Government Revenue Settlement.

Funding for 2008-09 has been made available to support local authorities to map the services already available across all statutory, voluntary and independent provision, and identify any service gaps and how these can be addressed. The allocation of resources for 2009-10 will be subject to determination of priorities based on the outcome of this year's work.