

Adam Price AM
Commissioner for Official Languages
National Assembly for Wales
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

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Dear Adam

National Assembly for Wales Official Languages Scheme

Thank you for attending the Committee's meeting on 10 May and for answering Members' questions about the draft National Assembly Official Languages Scheme for the fifth Assembly.

General

Broadly, Members were content with the scheme and acknowledged the generally excellent support they received to help them carry out their work in both the Assembly's official languages.

Members also noted the consultation responses that the Committee had received. Many of the issues raised in our consultation were addressed during questioning. However, the Committee would be grateful for your assurance that all the points raised, which have been published on the Assembly's website will be given due consideration by you and your officials before the Assembly is asked to formally adopt the scheme.

Further Information

There were some specific areas where you indicated that you intended to look further at issues raised by Members or would provide the Committee with further information. These areas were:

- *Accessibility of the Assembly's website for visually impaired people.* One Member reported that the Welsh version of the interface was not intelligible in Welsh as it was phonetically in English. You agreed to look further into this issue.



- *Microsoft Translator*. You agreed to consider whether the Microsoft Translator system can provide lessons on the language skills of users and of the use they make of the system.
- *Improvement Targets*. You explained that the Assembly Commission was not convinced that quantitative targets are the best way of reaching the main objective of a truly bilingual organisation. However, you agreed that it is important for the Assembly and external organisations to be able to hold the Commission to account on attainment. You may wish to give further thought to how this might be done in practice.

Recruitment Issues

There is one area where the Committee believes further information should be provided before the scheme is adopted. This concerns the new approach to recruitment set out in the draft scheme.

The Committee supports the move to a new fluency framework, which we understand will be based on a six point scale where the lowest level does not require any proficiency in Welsh and the highest level would require very high and specialised levels of proficiency. The intention is that all new Assembly staff would be required to demonstrate level 1 on this scale, which is described as ‘basic linguistic courtesy’.

There is little information in the draft scheme about how this would work in practice. However, you confirmed that the new approach would not apply (other than voluntarily) to existing staff and that the ability to speak Welsh to a particular level would not be a key part of decisions about staff promotion or advancement.

Despite this, it is not clear to us how decisions will be made about which particular standard on the scale will be required for any given post in the Assembly. The Committee would be grateful for further information on how this will work in practice and the sort of factors that will be taken into account in reaching these decisions.

The Committee also has some concerns that the new requirement for all new staff to achieve ‘basic linguistic courtesy’ may have an impact on our ability to recruit staff from underrepresented groups. You indicated some of the mitigation measures that you have in mind to address these concerns, particularly for BME groups. You also indicated that an Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared, which is currently being considered by an expert organisation, who will provide you with feedback on it.



Clearly, this is an important part of deciding whether mitigation measures in this area are sufficient. The Committee would therefore be grateful for sight of the assessment and the feedback you receive from the expert organisation before the Assembly is asked to approve the scheme.

Yours sincerely,

Bethan Jenkins

Bethan Jenkins AM
Chair of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

