

Information Further to Ministerial Answers

Information further to OAQ37587, issued by Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister, on 30 November 2004

To William Graham:

During First Minister's questions on 28 September 2004, you raised the issue, with regards to citizenship ceremonies, about the backlog of ceremonies and how there must be certainty that ceremonies are held in good time. The Welsh Assembly Government is not responsible for citizenship ceremonies, but I undertook to look into this issue. I am now writing to advise you on the outcome of these enquiries.

My officials contacted the Home Office and were advised that there were some 'teething problems' with the notification of new citizens to the local authorities, causing a backlog of citizenship ceremonies. This situation has now been addressed and the majority of the backlog has been cleared.

I understand that the Home Office has put in place a system whereby they notify local authorities when applications for citizenships are first received. The average time for the Home office to process an application is five months, so local authorities can factor in the likely number of future ceremonies required from the figures supplied by the Home Office.

I hope you find the above information useful.

To Jocelyn Davies:

During First Minister's questions on 28 September 2004, you raised the point, with regards to citizenship, about native English speakers with speech difficulties and how they would be assessed for fluency. The Welsh Assembly Government is not responsible for citizenship matters, but I undertook to look into this issue. I am now writing to advise you on the outcome of these enquiries.

My officials contacted the Home Office and were advised that the Department for Education and Skills has also raised this issue. I understand the following guidance is now in place.

If a 'designated person' conducting the interview does not feel comfortable with interviewing a person who appears to have speech difficulties, then the interview should be brought to an end. The applicant should then be advised to attend a language school for the interview on the basis that language teachers are usually adept at identifying the difference between a lack of knowledge and speech difficulty.

I hope you find the above information useful.