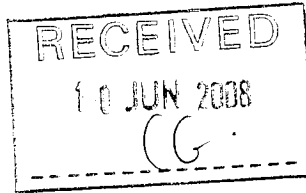


Jane Hutt AC/AM
Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau
Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref JH/00725/08



Helen Mary Jones AM
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7th June 2008

Dear Helen Mary

Thank you for your letter of 13 May following up points made during the plenary debate on 7 May on the Children and Young People's Committee report into Advocacy Services for Children and Young People in Wales.

I welcome the Committee's willingness to work constructively with the Assembly Government to help deliver our new integrated framework for advocacy services.

In response to the specific points in your letter, firstly I can confirm that children and young people will be represented on the National Independent Advocacy Board. I expect children and young people will have three representatives on the Board and I would want that to include a young person with experience of having been in care, for example. We need to keep the Board to a practicable size and get the right balance in membership between children and young people and others with expertise, knowledge and skills in children's rights, child welfare and advocacy. It should be remembered that representation on the Board is not the only way children and young people can have a say in the design and quality assurance of advocacy services. Under the new framework both the Assembly Government's Advocacy Unit, and the Children and Young People's Partnerships which will commission the local/regional integrated specialist advocacy services, will be required to have effective systems in place to engage and facilitate children and young people's involvement in the development of those services. The Board itself may also want to engage more widely with children and young people in carrying out its work.

Secondly, I can confirm that current commissioners and providers of advocacy services will not be eligible for appointment to the Board.

Thirdly, I agree that children and young people turn to a range of people with whom they have relationships to act as an advocate, to listen to them and to present their concerns. These include other children and young people who work as peer advocates or support self-advocacy. The national advocacy skills and training framework to be developed by the

Advocacy Unit will include accreditation training modules for front line staff such as teachers, doctors, cooks, cleaners etc, as well as less formal induction training. It is envisaged that local training to support capacity of lay advocates will be voluntary and should never exclude an individual acting in a role of a lay-advocate.

Finally, can I clarify that the Advocacy Unit set up in my department will not itself provide the national advocacy/advice service. The Unit will be responsible for commissioning the service, and for managing and monitoring its operation in consultation with the National Independent Advocacy Board. One of the Board's first tasks will be to consider a tender specification for the service, proposals for which will be developed over the summer with the two independent advisers we have appointed as an interim arrangement until the Board is established. I fully recognise the issues around accessibility of the service and those will be considered in light of the available budget when drawing up the tender specification.

I am considering the issues you raise in your further letter of 22 May and will respond substantively as soon as possible.

Best wishes,

Jane