

Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education

Local authorities and the governing bodies of voluntary aided (VA) and foundation schools retain the right to set term dates for their schools. However, they are under a duty to co-operate and co-ordinate with each other to ensure that term dates are the same or as similar as possible (section 32A of the Education Act 2002).

The arrangements respond to concerns about problems parents of siblings face in finding and financing child care where their children attend schools, with different term dates.

Local authorities are required to notify the Welsh Government of the term dates they propose to set by the last working day of August, 2 full years in advance of the dates in question.

All 22 local authorities submitted notifications of term dates they propose to set for 2018/19. Information was also received on behalf of 101 VA and foundation schools.

I am extremely impressed by the hard work undertaken by local authorities and VA and foundation schools in ensuring that term dates are the same or as similar as possible in 2018/19.

Due to their hard work they were able to agree consistent dates across Wales for all school holidays except the spring half term in 2019. One set of local authorities (17) and their VA and foundation schools chose the 25 February to 1 March 2019, whilst the other authorities, from the Education Achievement Service consortium covering South East Wales, chose a week earlier, i.e. 18 February to 22 February.

I was very encouraged to see that there was greater evidence of harmonisation than there was for the previous 2 exercises for term dates for 2016/17 and 2017/18. There was also significant evidence of agreement between local authorities and their VA and foundation schools as from 86 signed notices from these schools, 83 agreed to align with their authority, with the other 3 being Roman Catholic schools who chose to remain open during Holy Week.

Where consensus is not achieved the law provides that Welsh Ministers may direct local authorities and voluntary aided and foundation schools on what the dates will

be (section 32B of the 2002 Act). Before deciding to use these powers Welsh Ministers are under a duty to consult.

I consulted on term dates which were those chosen by the majority. A copy of the summary of consultation responses is published on the Welsh Government's website:

<https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/harmonising-school-term-dates-2018-2019>

In light of the work undertaken by local authorities to move to more harmonised term dates I have decided not to use my powers to direct local authorities and the governing bodies of VA and foundation schools as to what their term dates must be. The majority of Welsh local authorities have aligned for all bar one set of dates – the Spring Half Term in 2019 and here the difference is one week.

My expectation therefore is that local authorities and VA and foundation schools set their term dates for 2018/19 in line with those they originally notified to the Welsh Ministers.

My decision not to issue a direction on term dates for 2018/19, will not affect future term date setting arrangements. Local authorities and relevant school remain under a statutory duty to co-ordinate and co-operate with each other to ensure that term dates are the same or as similar as possible for 2018/19.

My officials will shortly be writing out to LAs and schools reminding them to submit notifications of the term dates they propose to set for 2019/20 to the Welsh Government by the last working day of August 2017.