

ORAL NO 4 (AQO 625/17-22)

DATE FOR ANSWER: Monday 14 September 2020

Mr Harry Harvey (Strangford):

To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to COVID-19, what discussions have taken place to seek to address potentially confused messaging across the four nations of the United Kingdom and to offer a more consistent and effective public message.

ANSWER

Discussions take place on a regular basis between the four nations of the United Kingdom on a range of matters including the communication of public health information.

Our overall messages are aligned and consistent. These are: regular hand washing; social distancing, and wearing of face coverings.

The Executive has set out its own roadmap to recovery and renewal. Decisions on the unfolding local context are based on medical and scientific evidence.

We have deployed a high impact public information campaign using television, radio, print and digital platforms to ensure people in Northern Ireland understand how to stay and save lives.

SUPPLEMENTARY INDEX

- 1. Public information campaign – phase 1**
- 2. Public information campaign – phase 2**
- 3. Public information campaign – phase 3**
- 4. Campaign Budget**
- 5. Support for Print Media**
- 6. Plans for UK-wide public information campaign**
- 7. Commitment to collaboration**
- 8. Press Conferences**
- 9. Sign Language Interpreters at Press Conferences**
- 10. Why do you need two sign language interpreters?**
- 11. Background Note**

Answer prepared by and further information available from:

Name: Name Redacted **Tel No:** I&S **6 Sept 2020**

Cleared by: Chris McNabb **Tel No:** I&S **7 Sept 2020**

1. Public information campaign – Phase 1

- **The Executive approved a high impact Coronavirus public information campaign in March.**
- **The first phase of the campaign had three key messages – Stay at Home, Keep your Distance and Wash your Hands.**
- **It is estimated to have reached approximately 97% of the population at least once.**
- **The average adult will have been exposed to the TV, outdoor, press and radio elements of the campaign 53 times. The digital activity delivered 15,041,148 impressions to date, meaning that digital messaging has been seen over 15 million times.**

2. Public information campaign – Phase 2

- **The second phase was rolled out on June 4. Its messaging of Stay Safe, Save Lives and Work Safe, Save Lives reflected the Executive’s roadmap to recovery and renewal.**
- **Campaign strands have included public messaging on Stop CovidNI App, Test Trace and Protect and more recently Face Coverings.**
- **It is estimated that adults have seen the campaign approximately nine times, with over 10 million impacts (opportunity for people to view the campaign).**
- **The face coverings campaign alone has delivered 5.2 million digital impressions, almost 38,000 clicks and over 3,500 reactions, shares, comments and likes since it launched on August 4.**
- **Targeted messaging and creative has been developed for key groups, for example, specific interactive creative for teenagers through Snapchat and Instagram.**
- **nidirect has attracted almost six million page views from 2.8 million users.**

3. Public information campaign – Phase 3

- **The next phase in early autumn will reinforce the public messaging of washing your hands, keeping your distance and wearing a face covering in confined spaces.**

4. Campaign Budget

- **£1.3 million has been spent on the campaign between March and September.**
- **The total media spend (March – September 2020) is £874,388.**
- **Of that £1.3m, £874,388 has been spend on media buying which is broken down as follows:**
 - **TV £307,346**
 - **Radio £142,579**
 - **Outdoor £96,837**
 - **Print £149,483 (of which weeklies account for £93,778**
 - **Digital £178,141**

5. Support for Print Media

- **Out of a total media spend of £874,388, print media spend accounts for £149,483 (March – September).**
- **This can be broken down by**
Weekly newspapers = £93,778
Daily newspapers = £55,705

6. Plans for UK-wide public information campaign

- **There is currently a proposal for a UK-wide public information campaign.**
- **This is entitled Hands, Face and Space and is currently being tested in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.**
- **This will be a heavy-weight campaign.**
- **It is consistent with our messages and would amplify the call to adhere to public health advice.**

7. Commitment to collaboration

- **The ‘Coronavirus Executive approach to decision-making’ sets out a commitment to good co-operation on both an East/West and North/South basis.**
- **It states: “It is anticipated that the approach to be taken as the restrictions relax will continue to be based on common principles...although there may be times when there are nuanced differences of approach as a result of the circumstances in differing jurisdictions, or of the timing of decision-making.”**
- **And “we will act with the long term health and well-being of people in mind.”**

8. Press Conferences

- **The Executive continues to utilise press conferences as part of its strategy to communicate with the public.**
- **To date, Executive Ministers have participated in 70 press conferences (as of 2 September).**
- **The Ministerial press conference is streamed live on the Executive Office's Twitter and Facebook accounts; on BBC NI news website and Downtown/CoolFM Facebook account. It is also carried live on BBC Radio Ulster's Evening Extra and shown on the BBC Parliament Channel.**
- **Feedback has been generally positive from both the media and the public, attracting a significant online audience on both the BBC and Downtown/Cool FM. The response from the deaf community to the signers has also been overwhelming positive.**

9. Sign language interpretation at press conferences

- **It is important that the key public health messages on Coronavirus reach as wide an audience as possible.**
- **Signers were deployed at the press conferences following representations from the deaf community in Northern Ireland. They suggested that we should include British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language translations as they are both used in Northern Ireland.**
- **The feedback from the deaf community has been overwhelmingly positive and we have received messages of support from individuals and organisations.**

10. Why do you need two sign language interpreters?

- **Irish Sign Language is not the signed equivalent of spoken Irish. It is not the case that those who understand Irish Sign Language understand spoken or written Irish. Sign language is a separate entity from written language and, to a lesser extent, spoken language.**
- **Similarly, a person who communicates in Irish Sign Language will not understand British Sign Language. These are two distinct audiences which share the common ground of being deaf or hard of hearing. It is not the case that we are duplicating.**
- **Alongside this, a significant portion of deaf adults have limited English literacy. They struggle with subtitles, filling out forms, reading a newspaper reports, etc. Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that subtitles would be an alternative to the signers.**

BACKGROUND NOTE

1. Harry Harvey, DUP, Strangford

Former Newry, Mourne and Down councillor, took MLA seat in September 2019 as replacement for Simon Hamilton.

Harry is a member of the Public Accounts Committee, DAERA Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee on the COVID-19 Response. He is also a member of the All Party Group on Ageing and Older People, All Party Group on Fairtrade, All Party Group on Social Enterprise, All Party Group on Cancer, All Party Group on Cycling, All Party Group on Learning Disability and the All Party Group on Visual Impairment.

Previously submitted written AQs regarding funding for medical student places at QUB and issues around provisional driving licences.

Has previously raised in the Chamber the importance of maintaining social distancing advice and issues around testing kits for care homes.

2. Submission currently with Ministers

Covid Communications Update

- This update paper outlines a proposed UK-wide public information campaign entitled Hands Face and Space.

3. Previous submissions to Ministers

Requests for a youth press conference were received and INV 1347-2020 applies.

- 29 April 2020, Rachel Woods, Green Party
North Down (**CORR-1410-2020**)
- 4 May 2020, Luke Patterson (**CORR-1434-2020**)

3. Previous Assembly Questions relating to communications during the pandemic in the current term

- There has been one Assembly Question tabled in this term in relation to communications during the pandemic:
 - 16 June 2020, Claire Sugden, Ind, East Londonderry (**AQO 437/17-22**)

4. Media coverage

The media have a continuing interest in the communications approach, particularly on press conferences as seen in <http://amanda.ie/stories/you-only-lift-a-crying-child>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-53780579>

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/comment/arlene-foster-and-michelle-oneill-split-shows-no-sign-of-ending-as-stormont-gets-back-down-to-business-39507666.html>

- The following statement has been issued in response to queries received:

An Executive spokesperson said: “The arrangements for the press conference are kept under review.”