

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 5 April 2000

[R] signifies that the Member has declared an interest.

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Questions to the Secretary for Education and Children

A-level Reforms

Q4 Elin Jones: What has the Secretary for Education and Children done to ensure that schools are fully able to implement the new A-level reforms? (OAQ4628)

The Secretary for Education and Children (Rosemary Butler): Schools and colleges were alerted in May 1999 to the nature of changes in qualifications that will be introduced from September 2000. The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales has subsequently issued two sets of detailed guidance. The additional funds for schools and colleges in the coming year took account of their assessments of the additional funding needed to implement these changes.

Unsatisfactory Work in Science at Key Stage 3 and 4

Q5 Phil Williams: Will Rosemary Butler make a statement on the high percentage of unsatisfactory work in science at key stage 3 and 4 in the Estyn report 1998-99? (OAQ4625)

Rosemary Butler: I am pleased that standards are satisfactory or better in the vast majority of science classes in key stages 3 and 4, but it is disappointing that standards are unsatisfactory in 12 per cent. Without wishing to be in any way complacent, there is more good work in science, and less unsatisfactory work than there was three years ago. The most recent findings are a dip on last year but we need to sustain the positive momentum towards higher standards, which emerged over this period.

Identification and Action for Special Educational Needs Children

Q6 Lorraine Barrett: Does Rosemary Butler have any plans to bring forward proposals to address the length of time taken between identification and action for special educational needs children in Wales? (OAQ4548)

Rosemary Butler: A key objective of our special educational needs action programme is earlier identification of and intervention in children's needs. More specifically, the SEN Code of Practice and SEN Regulations 1994 set clear time limits, within which local education authorities should, with certain exceptions, complete assessment and statementing procedures. A revised draft Code will be issued for consultation in Wales later this year.

Children's Information Services

Q7 Mick Bates: With reference to the guidance published by the Welsh Office for local early years development and childcare partnerships in Wales, what standards have been set for children's information services? (OAQ4619)

Rosemary Butler: Discussions are in train between Assembly officials, Choices in Childcare, Chwarae Teg and the Children's Information Bureau in Wrexham on the options for developing children's information services and quality standards in Wales. Guidance on standards will be issued later this year.

Lack of Rigour in Secondary Schools' Education Processes

Q8 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Can Rosemary Butler comment on the lack of rigour in secondary schools' education processes as identified in the Estyn report 1998-99? (OAQ4620)

Rosemary Butler: The reference in the annual report is to the lack of rigour in self-evaluation and the consequent implications for planning quality improvements and raising standards of achievement. This showed that the quality of self-evaluation was unsatisfactory in about one school in ten, but also highlighted that head teachers and senior managers generally know their schools well. Most self-assessment reports accurately identify the school's strengths but are less thorough in identifying weaknesses or areas for development. I am sure that, now this deficiency has been highlighted by Estyn, schools and local education authorities will address this matter in their local and strategic planning.

Proposed Performance Management Framework for Teachers

Q9 Jonathan Morgan: What representations has Rosemary Butler received on the proposed performance management framework for teachers? (OAQ4583)

Rosemary Butler: I have received numerous representations on the draft performance management framework for teachers, which was issued for consultation last year. Details of the main comments made as responses to the consultation exercise, as well as those raised in discussions with me, were set out in annex 1 to my paper setting out proposals for taking forward performance management for teachers in Wales, which was presented to the Pre-16 Education Committee on 1 March.

CHOICES Project in Denbighshire

Q10 Peter Rogers: Will Rosemary Butler comment on the CHOICES project in Denbighshire and its funding? (OAQ4581)

Rosemary Butler: While I support local and community initiatives such as CHOICES, which aid the delivery of personal and social education in Wales, I am anxious to leave the implementation of the new PSE framework and the tools that teachers use as a matter for local education authorities and schools to decide, so that local and community issues can be taken into account.

Teachers' Information and Communications Technology Skills

Q11 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: What measures will Rosemary Butler be introducing to promote teachers' information and communications technology skills? (OAQ4642)

Rosemary Butler: In the three years 1998-99 to 2000-01, we are providing up to £10.5 million through the grants for education support and training programme to improve teachers' information and communications technology skills across the curriculum. This is in addition to the £12.5 million being made available over three years through the new opportunities fund to train teachers and school librarians in the better use of ICT in subject teaching.

To ensure that teachers have access to the latest computer equipment we have also provided in the period 1998-99 to 2000-01 about £10.5 million to implement the National Grid for Learning.

Teachers will also benefit from the school-based ICT learning centres as part of our wider Education ICT strategy, which I announced on 20 March.

Statement on Estyn's 1998-99 Annual Report

Q12 Cynog Dafis: Can Rosemary Butler make a statement on Estyn's 1998-99 annual report? (OAQ4640)

Rosemary Butler: I welcome the overall improvement in results in national curriculum assessments and public examinations and congratulate the schools and their pupils for all their hard work.

The Chief Inspector points out that there is still a great deal of unevenness in schools' performance, within and between schools. Local education authorities are continuing to play their part in helping schools improve and many are achieving notable success. However, there are still significant gaps that must be bridged if national targets are to be achieved.

Higher education institutions have worked hard to ensure that their teacher training courses meet new requirements that were introduced in September 1998. Their work in partnership with schools continues to be of good quality. Adult and youth services are responding well to the agenda for lifelong learning.

I endorse the comments of the Chief Inspector when she points to the many challenges addressed by those working in education and training over the past few years.

Childcare Partnerships

Q13 Mick Bates: How does Rosemary Butler propose to help Welsh childcare partnerships provide full time development workers? (OAQ4618)

Rosemary Butler: Local childcare partnerships have been awarded funding of £1.4 million in 1999-2000 and 2000-01 to support the infrastructure required to promote childcare in each local authority area.

In addition, the out of school childcare initiative is contracted to Training and Enterprise Councils to provide infrastructure support for out of school childcare provision eligible for funding from the new opportunities fund.

Childcare Partnerships (Local Children's Information Services)

Q14 Michael German: What funding has been made available to childcare partnerships in Wales for the development of local children's information services? (OAQ4616)

Rosemary Butler: Local early years development and childcare partnerships were able to use the £1.4 million available in 1999-2000 under the national childcare strategy to support the development of children's information services if they saw a local need to do so. A further £1.4 million will be distributed to partnerships in support of the childcare strategy in 2000-01.

Special Educational Needs through the Medium of Welsh

Q15 Helen Mary Jones: What will Rosemary Butler do to ensure that those teaching children with special educational needs through the medium of Welsh are as well equipped as those teaching through the English language? (OAQ4632)

Rosemary Butler: Issues relating to the availability of SEN teaching and assessment materials will be looked at as part of our ongoing review of SEN policy and practice in the light of the publication last year of 'Shaping the Future for Special Education - An Action Programme for Wales'. The First Secretary and I have written to the Welsh Language Board in recent weeks confirming the Assembly's commitment to work with it in addressing a range of priority issues that were identified in the Board's recent conference on Welsh medium SEN provision.

Promoting Children's Issues

Q16 Christine Humphreys: What plan has Rosemary Butler to promote children's issues in Wales? (OAQ4592)

Rosemary Butler: I am committed to giving the highest priority to children's issues and the Assembly's strategic plan, 'A Better Wales', will give children and young people a high profile in the Assembly's policies and programmes in future years.

I am leading the development of a strategic approach to services for children and young people, which we discussed in Plenary on 15 September.

The Assembly has consulted a range of service providers from the statutory and voluntary sectors, and with children and young people in six meetings held across Wales in March. A draft strategic plan will be ready for further consultations in the early autumn.

Achieving a priority for issues affecting children will be assisted by the establishment of a children's commissioner, which my colleague, Jane Hutt, leads as Secretary for Health and Social Services. One of the commissioner's main responsibilities from the outset will be to make annual reports to the Assembly, the content of which will be a matter for discussion and consideration.

Independent Parental Supporters

Q17 Pauline Jarman: Does Rosemary Butler have a role in ensuring that all local education authorities provide sufficient resources for independent parental supporters? (OAQ4630)

Rosemary Butler: The Government commenced consultation last week on the proposed SEN and Disability Rights in Education Bill, which it proposes to introduce in the current parliamentary session. If enacted, the proposal in our SEN action programme—'Shaping the Future for Special Education'—that LEAs ensure that all parents of children with SEN have access to an independent parental supporter will become a legal requirement. If an LEA fails to provide an adequate independent parental supporter service to meet demand, it will be open to challenge for failing to comply with a statutory duty.

Mobile Phone Masts in Close Proximity to Schools

Q18 Val Feld: Has Rosemary Butler had any discussions with the Secretary for Transport, Planning and the Environment on the siting of mobile phone masts in close proximity to schools? (OAQ4545)

Rosemary Butler: No. There will be a need for further consideration following the publication of the Stewart report on mobile phones and base stations on 11 May.

School Closure Decisions

Q19 Nick Bourne: Will Rosemary Butler consider giving parents a greater say in school closure decisions, which are presently taken by the local education authorities and the Assembly? (OAQ4623)

Rosemary Butler: No. Parents already have an appropriate say under the statutory procedures for school closures. I judge each case on its merits, taking account of all factors brought to my attention, including the views of parents.

Local Children's Information Services

Q20 Kirsty Williams: How does Rosemary Butler propose to further the development of local children's information services in Wales? (OAQ4590)

Rosemary Butler: Discussions are in train between Assembly officials, Choices in Childcare, Chwarae Teg and the Children's Information Bureau in Wrexham on the options for developing children's information services and quality standards in Wales.

Schools' Strategic Planning

Q21 Gareth Jones: How will Rosemary Butler ensure that when additional money is provided to employ a teacher to keep key stage 1 classes to below 30, it is done in a manner which is compatible with the school's strategic planning? (OAQ4622)

Rosemary Butler: How schools organise themselves to carry out their functions and ensure that they comply with the statutory limit on infant class sizes is a matter for local decision.

In excess of £30 million additional funding has been made available to local education authorities and schools since September 1998 to help them meet the class size limit. In compiling their bids for grant, LEAs have been required to discuss with head teachers and governing bodies what, if any, organisational changes are required at a school to ensure that their infant classes are under 30. This may include making changes to the class organisation in schools, extending mixed age teaching arrangements, reviewing catchment areas or amending standard admission numbers, as well as bidding for grant for additional teachers, new classrooms or alterations to the school buildings. Schools have thus had the opportunity to consider the strategic implications before putting forward a bid for funding.

Changes to Academic Year

Q22 Lorraine Barrett: Does Rosemary Butler have any plans to bring forward proposals to assess the potential benefit to schools in Wales that may come from introducing four or five terms into the academic year and realigning the academic year with the financial year? (OAQ4547)

Rosemary Butler: As I have explained in my written answers of 9 December and 2 February, statutory responsibility for the determination for setting the dates of school terms rests with local education authorities. The Welsh Local Government Association is considering the matter and I look forward to seeing its conclusions.

Weakness of Monitoring in Subject Departments

Q23 Cynog Dafis: Can Rosemary Butler comment on the weakness of monitoring in subject departments identified in Estyn's 1998-99 report? (OAQ4641)

Rosemary Butler: The failure of some schools to establish rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation procedures—with use of specific criteria—is a key factor limiting the performance of these schools. Too often pupils in different classes or different subjects, within the same school, achieve varying results. Tackling this unevenness is a major challenge for schools and teachers. The grants for education support and training programme in 2000-01 continues to support local education authorities in helping to provide support and training to schools and teachers where there is an identified training need in this area.

Statementing

Q24 Jocelyn Davies: Will Rosemary Butler be looking carefully at the position of children with special needs to ensure that those who require statementing receive it? (OAQ4613)

Rosemary Butler: The Assembly, with the help of the Welsh advisory group on special educational needs, is in the process of reviewing SEN policy and practice in Wales in taking forward the measures outlined in 'Shaping the Future for Special Education - An Action Programme for Wales' published last year. A copy of the action programme is in the Library.

While it is for LEAs to determine whether a child requires to be assessed or to receive a statement, parents have a statutory right to appeal to the independent SEN tribunal if they disagree with LEA decisions. There are no plans to remove this important safeguard.

School Buildings

Q25 Peter Black: What additional money will be available next year to invest in school buildings as a result of the budget? (OAQ4552)

Rosemary Butler: I refer to the Finance Secretary's statement on 27 March 2000.

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Bryn y Môr

Q26 Alun Cairns: Does Rosemary Butler have any plans to visit Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Bryn y Môr? (OAQ4554)

Rosemary Butler: Not at present.

Repairs for School Buildings

Q27 Lynne Neagle: Will Rosemary Butler make a statement on the allocation in the budget to finance repairs for school buildings? (OAQ4621)

Rosemary Butler: I refer to the Finance Secretary's statement on 27 March 2000.

Condition of School Buildings

Q28 Jenny Randerson: Will Rosemary Butler make a statement on the condition of school buildings in Wales? (OAQ4572)

Rosemary Butler: The Welsh Local Government Association has estimated that the backlog of repairs to school buildings is in the order of £325 million. In 2001-02 and 2002-03, the Assembly's spending plans mean that around £175 million is being made available for capital investment in schools, most of it to local authorities. With this level of resources it will be possible to make significant inroads into the problem.

Special Educational Needs Services (Availability)

Q29 Jocelyn Davies: How will Rosemary Butler ensure that special educational needs services are available for all children who need them? (OAQ4634)

Rosemary Butler: Statutory responsibility for identifying and meeting the needs of all children with SEN rests with local education authorities and schools. Certain statutory duties also extend to health authorities and social services departments in co-operating with and meeting requests for services from LEAs in connection with children being assessed or those for whom a statement is maintained.

We recognise that the quality and delivery of some important services for children with SEN need to be improved. The SEN action programme identifies multi agency co-operation at local and regional level, pre and in-service SEN training for teachers, specialists, support workers and school governors, and the provision of timely and effective primary health care therapies and services for SEN children as priority areas for improvement.

Appraisal of Teachers

Q30 Jonathan Morgan: Will Rosemary Butler outline her policy on the appraisal of teachers in Wales? (OAQ4584)

Rosemary Butler: A paper setting out my proposals for taking forward performance management, including appraisal for teachers in Wales was presented to the Pre-16 Education Committee on 1 March.

Questions to the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development

Dairy Hygiene Charges

Q4 Jocelyn Davies: Will the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development make a statement on the prospect of lifting the dairy hygiene charges that dairy producers currently have to pay in Wales? (OAQ4562)

The Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development (Christine Gwyther): At the Prime Minister's agriculture summit on 30 March, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Nick Brown, announced that he had decided to lift dairy hygiene charges in England. The Assembly has already resolved to do so for Wales, provided that any legal difficulties could be surmounted. The decision to lift the charges in England should clear away the legal barriers since it creates a common position on charges across the United Kingdom.

Cyngor y Gweinidogion

C5 Elin Jones: Pam na chyhoeddodd Christine Gwyther o flaen llaw i'r Pwyllgor Amaethyddiaeth a Datblygu Gwledig ei bod yn bwriadu mynychu cyfarfod Cyngor y Gweinidogion ym Mrwsel ar 20 Mawrth? (OAQ4599)

Christine Gwyther: Y Weithrediadaeth sydd i benderfynu a ddylid mynychu cyfarfod Cyngor y Gweinidogion ym Mrwsel ai peidio.

Council of Ministers

Q5 Elin Jones: Why did Christine Gwyther not announce beforehand to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee that she intended to attend the Council of Ministers meeting in Brussels on 20 March? (OAQ4599)

Christine Gwyther: Decisions on whether to attend the Council of Ministers meeting in Brussels are for the Executive.

Yr Argyfwng yn y Sector Llaeth

C6 Cynog Dafis: A wnaiff Christine Gwyther ddatganiad ar ymdrech y llywodraeth i ddod â'r argyfwng yn y sector llaeth i ben, drwy sicrhau fod y pris y mae ffermwyr yn ei gael am eu cynnyrch yn cynyddu? (OAQ4601)

Christine Gwyther: Yr wyf yn cyfarfod â chwmnïau prosesu llaeth a'r manwerthwyr mawr i weld beth ellir ei wneud i sicrhau bod ffermwyr llaeth yn cael gwell pris am eu cynnyrch. Bydd y strategaeth a nodir yn y cynllun gweithredu ar gyfer y diwydiant llaeth hefyd yn helpu ffermwyr llaeth drwy hybu'r galw am eu cynnyrch a helpu cynhyrchwyr i berfformio hyd eithaf eu gallu.

Mae'r Llywodraeth newydd gyhoeddi pecyn o fesurau a fydd yn helpu ffermwyr, gan gynnwys ffermwyr llaeth. Bydd y Llywodraeth yn talu iawndal amaeth-arianyddol o £22 miliwn i ffermwyr llaeth yng Nghymru ac yn dileu taliadau hylendid llaeth.

Crisis in the Dairy Industry

Q6 Cynog Dafis: Will Christine Gwyther make a statement on the Government's effort to bring the crisis facing the dairy industry to an end, by ensuring that the prices farmers receive for their produce is increased? (OAQ4601)

Christine Gwyther: I am meeting dairy processing companies and major retailers to see what can be done to ensure better prices for dairy farmers. The strategy set out in the action plan for the dairy industry will also help dairy farmers by boosting demand for their products and helping producers maximise their performance.

The Government has recently announced a package of measures that will help farmers, including dairy farmers. The Government will pay £22 million in agri-monetary compensation for dairy farmers in Wales and will lift dairy hygiene charges.

Agri-monetary Funds

Q7 Jocelyn Davies: What amount would be specifically available to Welsh dairy farmers if the UK Government claimed the full amount of agri-monetary funds? (OAQ4567)

Christine Gwyther: Agri-monetary compensation for the dairy sector was discussed at the Prime Minister's summit held on 30 March. The Government has agreed to pay the maximum compensation available for dairy producers in the United Kingdom in 2000, which is £22 million. The Welsh share of this is estimated to be around 10 per cent, or £2.2 million.

Jobs in the Dairy, Lamb and Beef Processing Sector

Q8 Janet Ryder: How does Christine Gwyther intend to increase the number of jobs in the dairy, lamb and beef processing sector by 10 per cent, as stated in 'A Better Wales', in view of the present depression in the dairy industry? (OAQ4561)

Christine Gwyther: Agri-food action plans for the lamb, beef and dairy sectors were launched last year. They are based on the development of sales of Welsh agricultural products in profitable markets, together with added value food processing in Wales. The plans will help to deliver the 2003 target of 5 per cent growth in the dairy, lamb and beef industries, and their implementation will help secure the 10 per cent increase that summarises our vision of where we should like to be in 10 years.

Pwysau Economaidd ar Sectorau Amaethyddol

C9 Helen Mary Jones: Sut y mae'r trafferthion sydd yn wynebu'r sector llaeth yn cynyddu'r pwysau economaidd ar sectorau eraill amaethyddol? (OAQ4605)

Christine Gwyther: Mae'r effeithiau ehangach sydd yn wynebu'r diwydiant llaeth yn anodd i'w rhagweld gan eu bod yn dibynnu ar ffactorau fel faint o bobl sydd yn gadael y sector llaeth ac yn symud i'r sector da byw neu ddefaid. Bydd natur yr ymateb yn dibynnu ar ba mor hir fydd y problemau'n parhau.

Economic Pressure on Agricultural Sectors

Q9 Helen Mary Jones: How do the difficulties facing the dairy sector increase economic pressure on other agricultural sectors? (OAQ4605)

Christine Gwyther: The wider effects of the difficulties facing the dairy industry are difficult to predict as they depend upon such factors as whether people leave the dairy sector and move into the cattle or sheep sectors. The nature of the reaction will depend upon the length of time that the problems persist.

Carcass Identification

Q10 Owen John Thomas: How does Christine Gwyther propose to improve the system of carcass identification to promote Welsh produce in export markets? (OAQ4556)

Christine Gwyther: Carcass identification can be broken down into three main areas, which are classification to ascertain shape and fat levels, abattoir identification through a carcass stamping procedure and cattle passports in the case of beef.

New regulations on sheep tagging, which are due to take effect later this year, will help to ensure full traceability of Welsh lamb. The regulations will require all sheep and goats to be identified with an ear-tag or tattoo that will identify the animals' holding of birth. This will assist promotion of Welsh produce in export markets, though other significant steps have already been taken in this field.

Applications for designation of protected geographical indication have been submitted to the European Commission in respect of Welsh lamb and Welsh beef. The applications have been publicised in the European Official Journal and we understand that the PGIs should be granted by the summer. This will allow an even greater promotional drive on Welsh lamb and beef, though labelling will still be subject to the beef labelling regulations.

Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Ltd work with the Meat and Livestock Commission and the Welsh Development Agency as part of the agri-food strategy to promote Welsh lamb and beef at home and abroad. They have made significant strides in the success of exports and sales on the home market. In February I announced that Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Ltd had secured a £3 million export deal with a food service company, Ven International Versmarkt, to sell 350 tonnes of de-boned branded Welsh beef to Holland. Since Alimentaria, a major food fair, was held in Barcelona in March, a further order has been secured for 60,000 carcasses of lamb for April 2000, compared to 40,000 last year. Discussions are continuing with potential customers for the supply of Welsh beef to Spain.

Women in Rural Communities

Q11 Jane Davidson: How can the Assembly support women in rural communities? (OAQ4595)

Christine Gwyther: I am pleased to announce that the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations has accepted my invitation to hold its thirteenth international rural development summer school for women in Wales between 9 and 16 September. This will provide an excellent opportunity for delegates from across Europe to promote the important role of women and their families in rural areas. The theme of this year's event is 'networking and partnership building for rural development'.

In addition, Assembly officials are currently talking to women in Wales so as to identify their needs and the problems they face while living and working in Wales. The concerns of women from rural communities will be passed on to the appropriate divisions so that they can be taken into account in future policy development. In this way the Assembly will, for the first time, have direct information on what help and support is needed in order to better meet the needs of women from rural communities.

Discussions with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Q12 Peter Black: What discussions has Christine Gwyther had with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food regarding dairy farmers? (OAQ4559)

Christine Gwyther: I have been working closely with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Nick Brown, on the present difficulties facing dairy farmers. We met farming leaders at the Prime Minister's agriculture summit on Thursday, 30 March, when a range of issues was discussed, including measures to be taken to ensure a sustainable future for our dairy industry. The announcements made following that meeting provide for significant aid for the dairy sector.

Initiatives in Urban Areas

Q13 Christine Chapman: What initiatives are in place, or are due to be introduced, in urban areas of Wales to allow a greater understanding of the issues that affect rural Wales, communities in rural areas and rural development? (OAQ4540)

Christine Gwyther: The rural partnership's statement, 'Rural Wales', which was debated in Plenary last year, acknowledges that there is no distinct boundary separating urban and rural Wales and recognises their increasing interdependence. The challenges facing our urban and rural communities cannot, therefore, be addressed in isolation of each other. The rural partnership is already reviewing the key priorities identified in 'Rural Wales', as part of its forward work programme, to ensure a more targeted and focused approach to addressing the problems facing rural communities.

Also, the Objective 1 programme is one of a number of European programmes that will benefit both urban and rural communities in Wales. The Objective 1 single programming document recognises that there are fundamental differences between the challenges facing communities in the south Wales valleys and west Wales, but it also reinforces the need to spread economic prosperity and promote understanding throughout the whole of the Objective 1 area.

Together with Cabinet colleagues, I am committed to the development of economic, social and environmental policies and programmes that promote a better understanding of the differing needs of urban and rural areas and which contribute to a better future for all communities.

Llaethdai Cydweithredol

C14 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Sut y mae Christine Gwyther yn bwriadu annog ffermwyr llaeth i sefydlu eu llaethdai cydweithredol eu hunain? (OAQ4604)

Christine Gwyther: Mae ffurfio mentrau cydweithredol yn fater masnachol ar gyfer sefydliadau unigol yn y sector llaeth. Fe fydd y Cynulliad yn cefnogi mentrau o'r math yma yn unol â'r strategaeth bwyd-amaeth, lle ceir potensial dilys ac arwyddocaol i gynorthwyo'r diwydiant.

Mae cymorth grant ar gael oddi wrth adran amaethyddiaeth y Cynulliad yn unol â'r cynllun datblygu masnach i gynorthwyo ffermwyr, tyfwyr a phroseswyr i wella eu galluoedd marchnata. Mae'r cynllun yn darparu cymorth o 50 y cant o gostau cymwys. Mae cyfarwyddiaeth bwyd-amaeth Awdurdod Datblygu Cymru hefyd yn darparu cymorth i ddatblygu grwpiau cynhyrchu.

Co-operative Dairies

Q14 Ieuan Wyn Jones: How does Christine Gwyther intend to encourage dairy farmers to establish their own co-operative dairies? (OAQ4604)

Christine Gwyther: The formation of co-operative ventures is a commercial matter for individual organisations in the dairy sector. The Assembly will support such ventures under the agri-food strategy, where there is a genuine and significant potential to help the industry.

Grant aid is available from the Assembly's agriculture department under the marketing development scheme to assist farmers, growers and processors to improve their marketing expertise. The scheme

provides support of 50 per cent of eligible costs. The Welsh Development Agency agri-food directorate also provides help to develop producer groups.

Traceability and Labelling of Welsh Meat Products

Q15 Pauline Jarman: Has Christine Gwyther made representations to the European Union on the issue of traceability and labelling of meat products? (OAQ4564)

Christine Gwyther: The Assembly is anxious that Welsh agricultural products and foodstuffs achieve accreditation under the EU scheme for protecting food names. Applications for protection of geographical indication designation have been submitted to the European Commission in respect of both Welsh lamb and Welsh beef.

In addition, my officials have met the European Commissioner responsible for beef labelling and his officials to make representations about the compulsory beef labelling revisions proposed in Council Regulation (EC) No 820/97, which sets out the current provisions for establishing a system for identification and registration of bovine animals and regarding the labelling of beef and beef products.

Sheep Annual Premium Scheme (Inspections of Flocks)

Q16 Janet Davies: What percentage of inspections of flocks eligible for the sheep annual premium scheme are now made a) unannounced and b) within 48 hours? (OAQ4541)

Christine Gwyther: At present, 14 per cent of inspections for the sheep annual premium scheme are unannounced, and 86 per cent within 48 hours of notification.

Scab in Sheep

Q17 Peter Rogers: What proposals does Christine Gwyther have to counter the scab in sheep in Wales that is forecast to reach epidemic levels? (OAQ4593) [R]

Christine Gwyther: Legislation already exists to assist in the control of sheep scab. The Sheep Scab Order 1997 requires owners of sheep that are visibly affected with scab to treat them and all other sheep in the flock as soon as is practical. It is an offence to move sheep that are visibly affected with scab on to or off any premises, other than for treatment, immediate slaughter or under the authority of a licence. Also, local authorities can assist farmers to deal with confirmed sheep scab on common land by ordering the clearance of the commons and requiring that sheep are treated for scab before they are permitted to return.

GM Products Entering the Food Chain

Q18 David Davies: In light of their commitment to a GM-free Wales, what measures does Christine Gwyther propose to stop GM products entering the food chain elsewhere? (OAQ4566)

Christine Gwyther: The UK Food Standards Agency came into being on Monday 3 April and is responsible for advising the Assembly on food safety and standards. Jane Hutt has Assembly responsibility for the FSA.

We will look to this new, independent body to ensure that public confidence in the safety of food on sale is maintained and that novel foods and processes, including GM foods, continue to be rigorously assessed for safety in line with the regulatory framework. We also shall be looking to the FSA to promote accurate information and labelling to facilitate consumer choice.

Healthy Eating

Q19 Owen John Thomas: What initiatives has Christine Gwyther introduced to further the concept of the healthy eating aspects of Welsh farm produce? (OAQ4555)

Christine Gwyther: We are committed to working with the recently established Food Standards Agency to ensure that consumers are given clear, easy to understand information to help them make informed choices about the food they buy, including healthy eating. The FSA is responsible for advising the Assembly and the industry on food safety and nutrition and on the legislation applying to food labelling.

Location of GM Crops

Q20 Michael German: Is Christine Gwyther aware of any GM crops in Wales which might have been grown pursuant to marketing consents granted under part C of directive 90/220/EEC, and will she specify what system is in place to ensure that both she and the public know of the location of any such crops? (OAQ4539)

Christine Gwyther: I refer you to the answer I gave to Christine Chapman (OAQ4597) in Plenary earlier today.

Iawndal Amaeth-ariannol

C21 Cynog Dafis: A wnaeth Christine Gwyther drafod iawndal amaeth-ariannol gyda Nick Brown a Roger Finney pan fynychodd gyfarfod Cyngor y Gweinidogion ym Mrwsel ar 20 Mawrth? (OAQ4602)

Christine Gwyther: Trafodasom ystod eang o faterion, gan gynnwys iawndal amaeth-ariannol.

Agri-monetary Compensation

Q21 Cynog Dafis: Did Christine Gwyther discuss agri-monetary compensation with Nick Brown and Ross Finney when she attended the Council of Ministers meeting in Brussels on 20 March? (OAQ4602)

Christine Gwyther: We discussed a wide range of issues, including agri-monetary compensation.

TB Among Animals

Q22 Peter Rogers: What strategy does Christine Gwyther recommend to combat TB among animals in rural areas in Wales? (OAQ4594)

Christine Gwyther: The UK Government has implemented a five-point strategy to investigate the causes of, and to deal with the disease. The elements of the strategy are to minimise the risk to humans and investigate potential links to human health; to carry out research for the development of a vaccine; to understand better how infection is transmitted; to prevent spread from cattle to cattle; and to carry out a badger culling trial in certain selected areas.

The Government has also convened a TB forum, in which the Assembly participates together with participants from all parts of the industry, including the Farmers Union of Wales, NFU Cymru and the Countryside Council for Wales, as well as participants from welfare organisations such as the National Federation of Badger Groups. This forum allows for an open exchange of views and experience on this topic, and is considering ways forward pending the results of the scientific work.

Olrhain Anifeiliaid yn Electronig

C23 Gareth Jones: Beth yw polisi Llywodraeth Cymru ynglŷn ag olrhain ein hanifeiliaid yn electronig? (OAQ4612)

Christine Gwyther: Nid yw'r Cynulliad yn gofyn fod anifeiliaid yng Nghymru yn cael eu hadnabod trwy ddyfais electronig. Fodd bynnag, nid yw'n rhwystro cynhyrchwyr yng Nghymru rhag defnyddio dulliau adnabod electronig yn ychwanegol i'r tagiau sydd yn ofynnol o dan ddeddfwriaeth adnabod anifeiliaid.

Tracing Animals Electronically

Q23 Gareth Jones: What is the Government of Wales' policy regarding tracing our animals electronically? (OAQ4612)

Christine Gwyther: The Assembly does not require that animals in Wales be identified by an electronic device. This does not, however, preclude producers in Wales from using electronic identification in addition to the tagging required under animal identification legislation.

BSE Monitoring

Q24 Brian Gibbons: Is Christine Gwyther still monitoring the incidence of BSE in Wales? (OAQ4571)

Christine Gwyther: Yes. The incidence of suspected and confirmed cases of BSE reported in Britain is recorded and kept centrally. I am pleased to say that the numbers of confirmed BSE cases in Wales continued to fall last year.

Agri-monetary Compensation (Benefit to Welsh Dairy Farmers)

Q25 Phil Williams: In what way would Welsh dairy farmers benefit if the UK Government claimed the full amount of the available agri-monetary compensation? (OAQ4568)

Christine Gwyther: They will benefit financially since the Government will be paying the maximum compensation available for dairy producers in the UK in 2000, which is some £22 million. The Welsh share of this is estimated to be 10 per cent, or £2.2 million.

Nutritious Food Strategy

Q26 Brian Gibbons: Does Christine Gwyther have any plans to have discussions with the Food Standards Agency on promoting a nutritious food strategy for Wales? (OAQ4570)

Christine Gwyther: Assembly responsibility for the Food Standards Agency now lies with Jane Hutt.

Jane Hutt and I recently met Ann Hemingway, Chair of the FSA's advisory committee for Wales and discussed, amongst other things, the Assembly's and FSA's roles in nutrition.

In defining the health education message on nutrition, it will be important for the FSA and the Assembly to work closely together. The FSA will advise the Assembly on the nutritional content of foods and what constitutes a balanced diet.

A concordat between the Assembly and the FSA will define their respective roles and responsibilities. The FSA will submit its statement of general objectives and principles to the Assembly for agreement within the next three months, and this will include its proposals for nutrition.

Y Diwydiant Llaeth (Ffigurau Cyflogi)

C27 Gareth Jones: Faint o bobl y mae'r diwydiant llaeth yn ei gyflogi yng Nghymru? (OAQ4611)

Christine Gwyther: Mae ffigurau diweddaraf yr arolwg cyflogaeth blynyddol ar gyfer 1997 yn dangos bod 2,500 o bobl yn gweithio yn y diwydiant gweithgynhyrchu cynnyrch llaeth.

Yn ogystal, mae tua 3,000 o weithwyr fferm yn cael eu cyflogi, yn ôl cyfrifiad amaethyddol a garddwriaethol mis Mehefin 1999, ar ffermydd lle y prif weithgaredd yw ffermio llaeth. Nid yw hynny'n cyfrif y 7,300 o ffermwyr, partneriaid a chyfarwyddwyr, gan gynnwys partneriaid priod, sydd yn gweithio ar y ffermydd hynny.

Dairy Industry (Employment Figures)

Q27 Gareth Jones: How many people are employed by the dairy industry in Wales? (OAQ4611)

Christine Gwyther: Latest figures from the annual employment survey for 1997 show that there were 2,500 employees working in the manufacture of dairy products.

In addition, there are approximately 3,000 farm workers who, according to the June 1999 agricultural and horticultural census, were employed on farms where the predominant activity was dairy farming. This excludes 7,300 farmers, partners and directors, including spouses, working on those farms.

Measures to Assist Dairy Farmers

Q28 Peter Black: What measures is Christine Gwyther taking to assist dairy farmers? (OAQ4558)

Christine Gwyther: I am assisting the dairy industry in a number of ways, which include working to lift the dairy hygiene inspection charges in Wales; securing agri-money compensation this year for the dairy sector; and implementing the agri-food strategy through development of the dairy prospectus, the dairy action plan, and by awarding grants to dairy processing projects.

European Food Safety White Paper

Q29 Geraint Davies: What discussions has Christine Gwyther had with her Westminster counterpart to clarify whether milk and dairy products were discussed when the Council of Ministers met to discuss the European food safety White Paper? (OAQ4578)

Christine Gwyther: I was at the Council of Ministers meeting on 20 March when the White Paper on food safety was discussed. The discussion concentrated on the general principles and the Commission's approach, and not on specific commodities such as milk and milk products.

High Value of Sterling

Q30 Phil Williams: How does the high value of sterling contribute to the low prices that Welsh dairy farmers receive for their products? (OAQ4569)

Christine Gwyther: As for other industries, the effect of a rise in the value of sterling is to increase competitive pressure, as prices fixed in sterling rise in foreign currencies, eg euro, and prices fixed in foreign currency fall in sterling. The intervention price for butter and skimmed milk is set in euros, so a rise in the value of sterling reduces the value of the indirect support to the dairy industry.