

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 10 May 2001

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

[W] signifies that the question was tabled in Welsh.

Contents

- 1 Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services
- 6 Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Health and Wellbeing (Wales) Bill

Q8 Jonathan Morgan: Will the Minister's local health partnerships or strategic partnership boards be permitted under her proposed health and wellbeing (Wales) Bill to deliver, under delegated authority, social services currently exercised by local councils? (OAQ11254)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): The work of the NHS plan implementation task and finish groups will help to inform what legislation is required to implement the changes. It is too early to say what legislation might be required. The broad intention is for 'strategic partnership boards' to set the strategic direction for joint working between local government and the NHS, commit resources and monitor the effectiveness of joint planning and working between health and social care providers. Ultimate responsibility and accountability for service provision will, however, remain with the statutory partners. Under existing legislation local authorities can delegate certain health-related functions to NHS bodies and vice versa as well as making joint funding arrangements.

'Local health partnerships', will be developed to take on new responsibilities for commissioning and delivering health care for people in their localities.

It will be important for both 'strategic partnership boards' and 'local health partnerships' to maintain strong working relationships and we will design the functions of these bodies and the arrangements for membership accordingly.

'Strategic partnership boards' and 'local health partnerships' are the working titles used in the NHS plan. Their formal titles will be for decision in the light of the task groups' detailed work on their form and functions.

The Number of Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccinations

Q9 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the numbers of children being vaccinated with the MMR vaccine? (OAQ11193)

Jane Hutt: The current level of MMR vaccine coverage in children in Wales at age two continues its upward trend following the low rates seen in early 1999. The latest figures, for the quarter ending February 2001, shows that the current rate is 89 per cent. This is encouraging, but there remains much to do if we are to maintain sufficient levels of protection in the population to avoid the risk of outbreaks of disease, especially measles.

Parental concern over the use of MMR is having an impact on uptake and we are stepping up our efforts to enable parents to make fully informed decisions about the health of their children. Expert advice continues to urge the use of the MMR vaccine as the best protection against these diseases.

An information booklet has been issued and this will be supported by newspaper and television advertising and an educational video.

Flintshire Dentists No Longer Willing to Take NHS Patients

Q10 Alison Halford: What action is the Minister taking to combat the increase of Flintshire dentists no longer willing to accept NHS patients? (OAQ11172) *Withdrawn.*

Information and Communications Technology in the NHS in Wales

Q11 Brian Hancock: How does the Minister intend to develop the use of information and communication technology in the NHS in Wales? (OAQ11251) *Withdrawn.*

Rehabilitation of People Suffering Acute Neurological Trauma

Q12 Val Feld: Will the Minister make a statement on current provision in Wales for the rehabilitation of people suffering acute neurological trauma? (OAQ11281)

Jane Hutt: The provision of health services, including neurological trauma, is the responsibility of the local health authorities. They must assess the needs of their local area and, working with NHS trusts, local health groups and others, plan and prioritise their health services through their health improvement programmes to meet that need within the resources available.

Independence of New Public Support and Liaison Service

Q13 Gareth Jones: How does the Minister plan to ensure the independence of any new public support and liaison service for the NHS in Wales? (OAQ11260) *Withdrawn.*

Implications for Human Health of Pyres

Q14 Glyn Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the implications for human health of the large pyres burning in the countryside? (OAQ11190)

Jane Hutt: I made a statement to the Health and Social Services Committee on the impact of foot and mouth disease on human health on 2 May. Protecting public health has been the Government's overriding priority in handling the foot and mouth outbreak. Guidance issued on disposal of carcasses seeks to minimise the risks to human health through careful site selection, assessment and management.

Acute Services for Children in Wales

Q15 David Lloyd: How does the Minister plan to develop acute services for children in Wales? (OAQ11273) *Withdrawn.*

Development of the Medical Centre at Bangor

Q16 Gareth Jones: Would the Minister make a brief statement on the development of the medical campus at Bangor? (OAQ11250) *Withdrawn.*

Progress of the Action Plan for Carmarthenshire NHS Trust

Q17 Delyth Evans: Can the Minister make a brief statement on the progress of the action plan for Carmarthenshire NHS Trust? (OAQ11175)

Jane Hutt: My officials have been closely monitoring the trust's performance against the action plan developed from the recommendations of the Commission for Health Improvement, and in April a

multidisciplinary team visited the trust to assess this progress. The trust has made good progress against the broad requirements of the CHI report, bringing real improvements for patients and staff. However, both the trust and Assembly officials recognise the need for some further work.

The Health and Social Services Committee will be discussing the trust's progress at its meeting on 16 May.

Health Problems Caused by Deprivation in the Valleys

Q18 Geraint Davies: How does the Minister intend to tackle the health problems caused by deprivation in the Valleys? (OAQ11269) *Withdrawn.*

Pharmaceutical List at Chepstow Hospital

Q19 David Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the Assembly's decision to overturn Gwent Health Authority's approval of the application of Mr Robert Parker Davies for inclusion in the pharmaceutical list at Chepstow Community Hospital? (OAQ11191)

Jane Hutt: Although Mr Robert Parker Davies's application was approved by Gwent Health Authority, the Assembly received appeals from interested parties under the NHS (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations, 1992.

The Assembly considered carefully all the evidence placed before it in relation to the adequacy of pharmaceutical service provision in Chepstow, and concluded that it was neither necessary nor desirable to grant this application. The appeals were accordingly upheld.

The Assembly has issued a detailed decision letter to all interested parties. It is unable to reopen the matter.

Ambulance Response Times

Q20 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on ambulance response times? (OAQ11194)

Jane Hutt: Response times are recorded on a quarterly basis and measured against four performance standards. There are variations in performance between unitary authority areas but the latest all-Wales figures (October to December 2000) show:

- around 92 per cent of emergency calls arrived within 14, 18 and 21 minutes in urban, rural and sparsely populated areas respectively;
- around 91 per cent of all other emergency calls arrived within these times;
- around 85 per cent of doctor's urgent calls arrived within 15 minutes of the designated time.

There has been improvement over the last year in the eight-minute standard for a first response to emergency life-threatening calls (50 per cent in October to December 2000 against 46 per cent in the same period in 1999).

The ambulance trust is working hard towards improving performance using additional funding made available from health authorities and the £500,000 provided by the Assembly in 2000.

Sustainable Funding for the Voluntary Sector

Q21 Eleanor Burnham: What progress has the Minister made in achieving more sustainable funding for the voluntary sector? (OAQ11280)

Jane Hutt: We have undertaken a strategic review of voluntary sector funding. The need for longer term funding was one of its key recommendations. This is being implemented. We have already arranged for many of the National Assembly's grant schemes to move to a three-year funding basis giving organisations more confidence and certainty in their planning.

We are also committed to developing a code of practice for funding the voluntary sector. This will ensure greater consistency in the funding of grant schemes, by setting out a common rationale for funding. A draft is about to be issued for consultation and it is envisaged that the final code will be available in the autumn.

Dyfodol Adeilad Ysbyty Brenhinol Caerdydd

Q22 Owen John Thomas: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar ddyfodol adeilad Ysbyty Brenhinol Caerdydd? (OAQ11177) [W]

Jane Hutt: Mae Awdurdod Iechyd Bro Taf a grwpiau iechyd lleol wrthi'n llunio cynlluniau gwasanaeth ar gyfer dwyrain Caerdydd. Byddant yn ystyried safle'r Ysbyty Brenhinol a disgwylir eu hargymhellion drafft yn ddiweddarach eleni.

Yr wyf yn siŵr y gwnewch chi ddeall na allaf ddweud fawr fwy wrthyhch tan y bydd y cyrff amrywiol wedi cwblhau'u trafodaethau ac inni dderbyn eu hargymhellion.

The Future of the Cardiff Royal Infirmary Building

Q22 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the future of the Cardiff Royal Infirmary building? (OAQ11177) [W]

Jane Hutt: Bro Taf Health Authority and local health groups are currently formulating their service plans for eastern Cardiff. These will include the future use of the former CRI site and we expect to receive their draft proposals later this year.

I know that you will understand that there is little more that I can say until the various bodies have concluded their discussions and their proposals are received.

Human Health Implications of Foot and Mouth Disease

Q23 Glyn Davies: When did the Minister last discuss with the Chief Medical Officer the human health implications of foot and mouth disease? (OAQ11189)

Jane Hutt: I have had regular discussions with the Chief Medical Officer and other officials about the human health implications of foot and mouth disease, including its impact on families and communities and the risks posed by the disposal of carcasses.

Private Medical Practice within the Health Service in Wales

Q24 Richard Edwards: Can the Minister make a statement on private medical practice within the health service in Wales? (OAQ11233) *Withdrawn.*

Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Q25 Geraint Davies: Would the Minister make a brief statement on the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust? (OAQ11257) *Withdrawn.*

Dyfodol Cartref Danygraig

C26 Owen John Thomas: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar ddyfodol Cartref Danygraig, Porthcawl? (OAQ11176) [W]

Jane Hutt: Yn y blynyddoedd diwethaf, mae awdurdodau lleol yn ardal hen Gyngor Sir Morgannwg Ganol a thu hwnt wedi lleihau eu hymrwymiad i gymryd lleoedd yn Nhanygraig. Mae'r Gymdeithas Sglerosis Ymledol wedi lleihau ei hymrwymiad hithau. Canlyniad hynny yw gadael Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr â baich ariannol mawr i gynnal cartref sydd yn fwy na'r hyn sydd ei angen arno.

Yn sgîl cynnal arolwg Gwerth Gorau, mae'r awdurdod lleol wedi penderfynu na all barhau i dalu am y ganolfan ac y dylid ailfuddsoddi adnoddau i ddarparu gwasanaethau gofal seibiant i bobl ym Mhen-y-bont mewn ffyrdd eraill. Mae'r awdurdod lleol wrthi'n siarad hefyd ag ymddiriedolaeth yr NHS ynghylch defnyddio'r ganolfan mewn ffyrdd eraill.

The Future of Cartref Danygraig

Q26 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the future of Cartref Danygraig, Porthcawl?(OAQ11176) [W]

Jane Hutt: In recent years local authorities in the former Mid Glamorgan County Council area and others further afield have reduced their commitment to take places at Danygraig. The Multiple Sclerosis Society has also reduced its commitment. This has left Bridgend County Borough Council with a considerable financial burden for a facility that is beyond its own needs.

Following a Best Value review, the local authority has concluded that it can no longer continue to underwrite the centre and that the resources should be reinvested to provide respite care services to people in Bridgend in other ways. The local authority is also in discussion with the NHS trust about possible alternative uses for the centre.

Improving Cancer Treatment in Wales

Q27 John Griffiths: What steps will be taken to further improve cancer treatment in Wales? (OAQ11216) *Withdrawn.*

Health and Wellbeing (Wales) Bill

Q28 Jonathan Morgan: Will the Minister make a statement on her proposed health and wellbeing (Wales) Bill? (OAQ11253)

Jane Hutt: I have nothing to add at this stage to what the First Minister said in the debate on 13 March 2001.

Autism Awareness Week

Q29 Janet Davies: How does the Minister intend to mark autism awareness week in Wales? (OAQ11252) *Withdrawn.*

Alleviating Stress in Rural Areas

Q30 Richard Edwards: What measures are being taken to alleviate stress in rural areas as a result of the foot and mouth epidemic? (OAQ11234) *Withdrawn.*

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Rural Schools Policy

Q6 Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister inform us of the progress to date on formulating a rural schools policy, as set out in the partnership agreement? (OAQ11185) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): The review which the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee is currently conducting on the supply of school places touches on issues relating to rural schools. I will be considering future policy in the light of its conclusions. Its report is due to be debated in Plenary before the summer recess.

Question 7 was answered in Plenary.

New Deal (Number of Jobs Created)

Q8 Janet Ryder: What assessment has been made of the number of new jobs created by the New Deal in Wales? (OAQ11209)

Jane Davidson: The New Deal is not a job creation scheme but a programme of individually tailored support to help people into real sustainable jobs. Nevertheless, independent research conducted recently for the Employment Service has indicated that around one in five subsidised jobs made available under the New Deal are new jobs.

Primary and Secondary Church Schools

Q9 David Melding: How many more primary and secondary church schools will be created in the next 10 years in Wales? (OAQ11239)

Jane Davidson: It is for each diocese to consider bringing forward proposals for the provision of new church schools in their areas, in the light of a need for additional places, demonstrable parental demand and available resources.

Additional Funding for Improving Schools

Q10 David Davies: What discussions has the Minister had with the Welsh Local Government Association regarding allocation of additional funding for improving schools? (OAQ11165)

Jane Davidson: The Welsh Local Government Association was consulted on proposals for the distribution of the additional £26 million provided to reduce junior class sizes, improvements at key stage 3 and to assist under-performing schools which was the subject of a special grant report approved by the Assembly on 8 March 2001; and on distribution of the £15 million for supporting school improvement measures, which is the subject of a special grant report to be debated in Plenary today. Both grants are for this financial year.

Community-based Adult Education

Q11 Brian Hancock: Will the Minister make a statement on the importance of securing adequate community-based adult education in Wales? (OAQ11211)

Jane Davidson: Our new arrangements for post-16 education and training aim to combat social exclusion, promote equality of opportunity and support the development of a world class economy by widening participation in learning. The National Council for Education and Training, ELWa, has been remitted to increase the availability of flexible, high quality, learning opportunities and to improve access to those opportunities.

Community-based adult education has a vital role to play in engaging or re-engaging adults in learning and thus in developing the learning habit. For many it represents an opportunity to exercise or refresh the mind or to develop a personal skill; and for some it acts as a springboard into higher level institutional or employment-based learning.

Adult education is therefore an essential element in the wide range of learning provision for which the ELWa is now responsible. It will be for ELWa to assess requirements in this field and to plan its service provision within the resources that have been made available for this purpose by the Assembly.

Welsh Language Education in Swansea

Q12 Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of Welsh language education in Swansea? (OAQ11186)

Jane Davidson: I am informed by Swansea local education authority that an additional 120 Welsh-medium primary places were provided in September 2000, 60 of which were funded through the infant class size reduction grant received from the National Assembly. From September 2001, post-16 provision will also be established at Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr.

The City and County of Swansea's Welsh education scheme sets clear targets to establish a new Welsh-medium primary school and to increase the provision of Welsh-medium secondary school places by a further 450 by September 2002. Following my decision to approve the amalgamation of Penlan and Mynyddbach Schools on the Mynyddbach site, Swansea LEA has indicated that it will now move forward with consultation on proposals for the possible relocation of Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr to the Penlan site, which will allow for expansion.

Welsh Baccalaureate (Pilot Programme)

Q13 Jocelyn Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on recent progress in the process of developing a pilot programme for the Welsh baccalaureate? (OAQ11208)

Jane Davidson: The closing date for submitting tenders was 30 April. The evaluation process has now commenced and I will make an announcement about the contract award later this month.

Hyfforddi Athrawon (Torri'r Nifer o Leoedd)

C14 Gareth Jones: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar y cynllun i dorri'r nifer o leoedd ar gyfer hyfforddi athrawon yng Nghymru? (WAQ11219) [W]

Jane Davidson: Mae'r dystiolaeth yn dangos bod Cymru wedi bod yn hyfforddi nifer anghymesur o uchel o athrawon cynradd, llawer mwy nag y gellir eu cyflogi yma. Ychydig iawn o swyddi gwag sydd ar gael ar hyn o bryd mewn ysgolion cynradd, mae ein cyfran o'r targedau mewn perthynas â'r rhai sydd yn cael eu derbyn i fod yn athrawon cynradd wedi bod lawer yn uwch na'r gyfran boblogaeth, o gymharu â Lloegr; ac mae'r galw am athrawon cynradd, ar y cyfan, yn gostwng. Nid ydym am foddi'r farchnad athrawon cynradd, gan na fyddai hyn o help i ddarpar athrawon nac i'r system addysg yn gyffredinol.

Yr ydym am geisio lleihau'n raddol nifer y lleoedd sydd ar gael. Yr ydym wedi gofyn am weld cynigion Cyngor Cyllido Addysg Uwch Cymru ar sut i gyflwyno cyfres o ostyngiadau sylweddol dan reolaeth yn y ddarpariaeth gynradd, yn enwedig ar lefel tystysgrif addysg i raddedigion, o 2002-03 ymlaen. Mae'r gwaith ar hyn yn parhau.

Trainee Teachers (Reducing Number of Places)

Q14 Gareth Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the plan to reduce the number of places for trainee teachers in Wales? (OAQ11219) [W]

Jane Davidson: Evidence supports the view that Wales has been producing a disproportionately high number of primary school teachers, far more than can be employed here. We have a low level of primary vacancies at present; our share of the primary intake targets compared to England has been considerably above a population share; and the projected demand for primary teachers as a whole is declining. We do not want to oversupply the primary teacher market, which would neither serve would-be teachers nor the wider education system.

We are looking for a phased reduction in the number of places. We have asked to see proposals from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales on how a series of managed and significant reductions in primary provision, particularly at post-graduate certificate of education level, could be introduced from 2002-03. Work on this is continuing.

Educational Needs of Children Diagnosed as Autistic

Q15 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the provision of resources for the educational needs of those children diagnosed as autistic? (OAQ11184)

Jane Davidson: I am aware of the increase in the number of children diagnosed as having autistic spectrum disorders. It is, however, for local education authorities in the first instance to plan to meet educational needs in line with their statutory duties.

The Assembly has established regional special educational needs pilot planning projects to look at existing and planned provision. Each of these groups will identify numbers of pupils and the range of provision currently available. They will also consider cost effective ways of making suitable provision on a regional basis.

I have nevertheless decided to move towards an all-Wales pilot project to ensure that even greater effectiveness can be derived from existing and planned provision.

I have also made up to £2 million available for the development of Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn, which is a regional centre for autistic children in north Wales.

Truancy in North Wales Schools

Q16 Alison Halford: What actions is the Minister taking to combat truancy in north Wales schools? (OAQ11168) *Withdrawn.*

Career Services (Quality Assurance Mechanisms)

Q17 Christine Gwyther: What quality assurance mechanisms are in place for career services in Wales? (OAQ11230) *Withdrawn.*

Key Skills Exam (Equality of Opportunity)

Q18 David Lloyd: What steps have been taken to ensure equality of opportunity for students and pupils who decide to sit the key skills exam through the medium of Welsh in the next academic year? (OAQ11220) [W] *Withdrawn.*

Educational Visits to Community Farms and Wildlife Attractions

Q19 William Graham: Will the Minister seek to secure funding to allow for an extended programme of educational visits to community farms and wildlife attractions as soon as the foot and mouth disease precautions have been lifted? (OAQ11183)

Jane Davidson: Substantial additional funding is being provided by the Assembly for schools through the local government revenue settlement and in the form of special grants in 2001-02. It is for each school to decide how to spend its available resources.

I would strongly encourage all schools who have had visits cancelled to rearrange them once farms and wildlife attractions reopen.

Status of Citizenship in the National Curriculum

Q20 Richard Edwards: Will the Minister make a statement on the current status of citizenship within the national curriculum? (OAQ11228) *Withdrawn.*

Further Education Colleges (Welsh Medium Education)

Q21 Elin Jones: What measures has the Minister taken to address concerns surrounding the provision of Welsh medium education in further education colleges in Wales? (OAQ11201) *Withdrawn.*

Rural Schools Strategy

Q22 Richard Edwards: Will the Minister make a statement on the development of a rural schools strategy for Wales? (OAQ11227) *Withdrawn.*

Pilot of Welsh Baccalaureate

Q23 Elin Jones: Has the Assembly administration rejected the possibility of developing an international baccalaureate-based model for the proposed pilot of a Welsh baccalaureate? (OAQ11210) *Withdrawn.*

Budgetary Shortfalls (Representations from Schools)

Q24 Cynog Dafis: How many representations has the Minister received from schools in Wales regarding budgetary shortfalls this year? (OAQ11221) *Withdrawn.*

Darpariaeth Blynyddoedd Cynnar

C25 Owen John Thomas: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar y paratodau a wneir i gyflwyno'r cynlluniau newydd ar gyfer darpariaeth blynyddoedd cynnar? (OAQ11167) [W]

Jane Davidson: Mae dau o argymhellion ein hadroddiad 'Gosod y Sylfaen: Estyn Darpariaeth y Blynyddoedd Cynnar i Blant Teirblwydd' eisoes wedi cael eu rhoi ar waith. Mae panel ymgynghorol blynyddoedd cynnar wedi cael ei ffurfio i roi cyngor i mi ar ddatblygu cynllun gweithredu integredig, a phleser oedd bod yn bresennol yn ei gyfarfod cyntaf ar 25 Ebrill 2001. Mae'r cyfarfodydd nesaf eisoes wedi cael eu trefnu ac edrychaf ymlaen at dderbyn adroddiad am sut y maent yn dod ymlaen. Mae'r panel hefyd wedi cytuno i sefydlu is-grwpiau i archwilio'n fanylach amrywiaeth o faterion allweddol sydd yn codi o'r adroddiad ac maent hwythau hefyd wedi cytuno ar ddyddiadau ar gyfer eu cyfres eu hunain o gyfarfodydd.

Mae'r swyddogion hefyd wedi ysgrifennu at yr awdurdodau addysg lleol, yn ogystal â phartneriaethau datblygu'r blynyddoedd cynnar a gofal plant yng Nghymru, am yr archwiliad o'r ddarpariaeth bresennol

ac amcangyfrifon o'r galw yn y dyfodol, a fydd yn help i gynllunio'r anghenion o ran datblygu a'r goblygiadau o ran cost.

Mae pob un sydd ynghlwm wrth hyn yn cydnabod ein bod yn awyddus i sicrhau bod darpariaeth lawn hanner-amser yn cael ei gwneud ar gyfer pob plentyn teirblwydd, yn unol â dymuniad y rhieni, erbyn Medi 2004 ac yr wyf yn hyderus y caiff hynny ei gyflawni.

Early Years Provision

Q25 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the preparations being made to introduce the new schemes for early years provision? (OAQ11167) [W]

Jane Davidson: Two of the recommendations within our report 'Laying the Foundation: Extending Early Years Provision to Three Year Olds' have already been implemented. The early years advisory panel has been established to advise me on the development of an integrated implementation plan and I was pleased to attend its first meeting on 25 April 2001. Subsequent meetings have already been planned and I look forward to receiving a report on their progress. The panel has also agreed to establish sub groups to examine in greater detail a range of the key issues arising from the report and they too have agreed dates for their own series of meetings.

Officials have also written to the local education authorities as well as the early years development and childcare partnerships in Wales about the audit of current levels of provision and estimates of future demand which will form the basis for planning the development needs and cost implications.

There is a very clear recognition by all concerned that we wish to ensure that full half time provision is made for all three-year-olds whose parents want it by September 2004 and I am confident that it will be achieved.

Truancy and Absenteeism in Schools

Q26 David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on levels of truancy and absenteeism in schools in Wales? (OAQ11212) *Withdrawn.*

Further Education (Additional Resources)

Q27 Christine Gwyther: Will the Minister make a statement on any recent additional resources allocated to further education in Wales? (OAQ11229) *Withdrawn.*

Tourism Industry (Training)

Q28 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister do more to encourage work-related training in the Welsh tourism industry? (OAQ11179)

Jane Davidson: The Tourism Training Forum for Wales is already working to develop an integrated education and training development policy for the benefit of the tourism industry in Wales. Discussions are taking place between the Tourist Board and ELWa with a view to strengthening the role of the forum. In addition, I am well aware of the impact that the outbreak of foot and mouth disease is having on the industry. To help alleviate this impact, ELWa is preparing a package of measures to help those affected. These measures will include training and skills development opportunities designed to retain experienced personnel during these difficult times. They will also equip tourism operators with better-qualified staff to enable them to recover more quickly when the problems abate.

Further Education (Weaknesses in Provision)

Q29 Cynog Dafis: Will the Minister make a statement on how she intends to address the weaknesses in provision in the further education sector identified in the Estyn annual report? (OAQ11203) *Withdrawn.*

Viability of Small Schools

Q30 Kirsty Williams: What steps does the Minister plan to take to maintain the viability of small schools? (OAQ11265)

Jane Davidson: It is for local education authorities to decide on the viability of individual schools. Educational considerations must be paramount in such decisions.

Through their school organisation plans, LEAs are required to assess supply and demand for school places and draw conclusions about whether their existing pattern of provision delivers a high quality, accessible and cost effective education service.

Where authorities decide there is a need to change the pattern of provision, they must consider the impact on educational standards, on parental choice, on local communities and the alternatives to closure such as federation. Where proposals for closure or change attract objections they come to me for determination. I look at each case on its merits.