

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 12 July 2001

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

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

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Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Improving Retention Levels in the Social Care Workforce

Q6 Jocelyn Davies: How does the Minister intend to improve retention levels in the social care workforce in Wales? (OAQ12608)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): I have received recommendations for a full and comprehensive strategy for tackling workforce issues from a specialist task and finish group, which I established earlier this year. The group's recommendations make it clear that we need to take long-term, sustained action on a number of fronts, if we are to provide the quality services to which we aspire.

The group is developing an implementation plan and I have made it clear that we will work in partnership with the sector to achieve the necessary changes. The group's report will be published in the autumn.

Modernisation of Audiology Services

Q7 Dafydd Wigley: How is the modernisation of audiology services in the national health service proceeding? (OAQ12610)

Jane Hutt: As announced in February this year, £1.5 million has been allocated to the NHS in Wales to improve NHS hearing aid services across Wales. There is further funding earmarked for 2002-03 and 2003-04 subject to budget planning round decisions. The project board met for the first time on 7 June 2001. The project team is now auditing existing audiology centres and services and addressing improvements in the equipment and training of audiologists. A report will be presented to the board in September. Trusts will then be invited to submit bids for improving their facilities, and these will be considered at the October board meeting, where the allocation of funds to trusts will be finalised. By April 2002, the project board intends that audiology departments will be able to assess whether a patient would benefit from advanced technology hearing aids.

Tackling Health Inequalities in Wales

Q8 Janet Davies: How does the Minister intend to tackle health inequalities in Wales? (OAQ12602)

Jane Hutt: Tackling health inequalities requires action within and beyond the NHS. Underpinned by 'Betterwales.com', we are helping individuals to improve their own health and we are also addressing the socio-economic factors affecting health. Our health inequalities fund is supporting new action in deprived communities, while our resource allocation review is a significant development. The Health and Social Services Committee has discussed Professor Townsend's report and agreed to consult on a new approach to ensure that NHS resources are targeted more effectively on poor health. Communities First and Objective 1—both featuring health—are addressing the socio-economic factors.

Reducing Ill-health Caused by Environmental Pollution

Q9 Janet Ryder: What measures can the Minister take to reduce ill-health caused by environmental pollution? (OAQ12617)

Jane Hutt: As stated in our sustainable development scheme, the Assembly is committed to putting people and their quality of life now, and in the future, at the centre of its concern. We have already introduced a number of policies, many of which are driven from Europe, which seek to ensure the protection of the environment and human health. Further measures will come forward over time.

Conducting Tonsillectomy Operations (Production of Suitable Instruments)

Q10 Janice Gregory: Could the Minister give an update on the progress made in the production of suitable instruments needed to conduct tonsillectomy operations in Wales? (OAQ12538)

Jane Hutt: This year, £1 million has been allocated for the purchase and supply of single-use instruments for tonsillectomy operations. Welsh Health Supplies will supply these instruments to the trusts on behalf of the National Assembly.

The first batch of these instruments was delivered to Welsh Health Supplies on 6 July 2001. The trusts will be allocated a fixed number of tonsillectomy kits based on the number of operations performed in previous years. Once the trusts have confirmed these figures, the single use instruments will be distributed.

Continuation of Important Services at Small Community Hospitals

Q11 Nick Bourne: What steps can the Minister take to ensure the long-term continuation of important services at small community hospitals in Wales? (OAQ12536)

Jane Hutt: Policy on the role and future of community hospitals was issued in 1996 in the report 'Community Hospitals in Wales: The Future'. The report provided purchasers and providers with advice regarding the potential of community hospitals.

That guidance recognised the need for smaller, local hospitals to provide a range of services based on local need. A key recommendation was that each community hospital should have a clear, locally agreed role, with the facilities and skill of the staff reflecting this role.

Local health groups, NHS trusts and other key stakeholders will be responsible for considering and agreeing the role of their community hospitals as part of delivering the wider health agenda.

Addressing Health Inequalities in Wales

Q12 Christine Gwyther: What policies is the Minister pursuing to address health inequalities in Wales? (OAQ12517) *Withdrawn.*

Nifer y Nyrsys dan Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

C13 Owen John Thomas: Sut y mae nifer y nyrsys dan hyfforddiant yng Nghymru ar hyn o bryd yn cymharu â'r nifer sydd wedi gadael y proffesiwn yn ystod y flwyddyn ddiwethaf? (OAQ12545) [W]

Jane Hutt: Ni chedwir cofnod o nifer y nyrsys sydd yn gadael y proffesiwn yn barhaol yn ganolog. Er bod ymddiriedolaethau a chyflogwyr eraill yn cadw cofnod o nifer y nyrsys sydd yn eu gadael, mae'n annhebygol iawn y bydd y rhain yn dangos a ydynt yn symud i swydd arall yn y proffesiwn nyrsio ai peidio.

Mae'r cynlluniau eleni ar gyfer y gweithlu yn cynnwys gwybodaeth a gyflwynwyd gan y sector gwirfoddol, y gwasanaethau cymdeithasol a'r sector preifat, ynghyd â sefydliadau eraill sydd yn cyflogi nyrsys, a bydd yn darparu darlun mor gyflawn â phosibl o'r proffesiwn nyrsio yng Nghymru.

Mae nifer y nyrsys sydd o dan hyfforddiant yng Nghymru yn berthnasol i anghenion y gwasanaeth iechyd yn y dyfodol, gan ystyried materion megis y nifer sydd yn ymddeol, trosiant staff a chynyddiadau cyffredinol o ganlyniad i ddatblygiadau yn y gwasanaeth.

The Number of Trainee Nurses in Wales

Q13 Owen John Thomas: How does the number of trainee nurses in Wales compare with the number that have left the profession during the last year? (OAQ12545) [W]

Jane Hutt: The number of nurses who leave the profession permanently is not held centrally. While trusts and other employers will have records of the number of nurses who leave their employment, it is unlikely that these will show whether they move to another job in the nursing profession or not.

This year's workforce plans include data submitted from the voluntary, social services and private sectors and other organisations employing nurses, and will provide as complete a picture as possible of the nursing profession in Wales.

The number of trainee nurses in Wales relates to the health service's identification of future need, taking into account such issues as retirements, staff turnover and overall increases as a result of service developments.

Promoting Healthy Eating Among Children

Q14 Jocelyn Davies: What action is being taken to promote healthy eating among children in Wales? (OAQ12596) *Withdrawn.*

The Role of Public Private Partnerships/Private Finance Initiatives in the Health Sector

Q15 Phil Williams: Would the Minister make a brief statement on the role of public private partnerships/private finance initiatives in the health sector in Wales? (OAQ12611) *Withdrawn.*

Access to NHS Dentists in Wales

Q16 Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement on access to NHS dentists in Wales? (OAQ12501)

Jane Hutt: We are committed to ensuring that a comprehensive, high quality, NHS dental service is available to all who wish to use it no matter where in Wales they live. Any unregistered patient who needs help in finding an NHS dentist should contact the local health authority for names and addresses of practices willing to accept new NHS patients.

The Welsh dental initiative, first launched in 1995, has already had considerable success in attracting new dentists to those parts of Wales where they were most needed. It has enabled health authorities in Wales to offer grants to dentists for new or expanding practices, and to NHS trusts for the expansion of the community dental service. Stage 2 of the initiative was launched in July 1998, with greater flexibility specifically designed to meet the needs of areas with special difficulties.

Recurrent funding has now been set aside to ensure the continuation of the initiative and we are presently considering how it might be further enhanced. In the meantime, grant aid is still available to dentists willing to make a sustained commitment to the NHS and establish new practices or expand existing ones

in any qualifying area that has not yet attracted applicants. Where necessary, health authorities can apply for new areas to be designated eligible for grant aid.

Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Q17 Geraint Davies: Would the Minister make a brief statement on the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust? (OAQ12618) *Withdrawn.*

Provision of Oncology and Radiotherapy Services in Wthybush Hospital

Q18 Richard Edwards: Can the Minister make a statement on the provision of oncology and radiotherapy services in Wthybush Hospital? (OAQ12515) *Withdrawn.*

Development of Flexible Working Hours in the NHS

Q19 Elin Jones: What action is being taken to consult staff regarding the development of flexible working hours in the NHS? (OAQ12609) *Withdrawn.*

Development of the Medical Campus at Bangor

Q20 Gareth Jones: Would the Minister make a brief statement on the development of the medical campus at Bangor? (OAQ12615) *Withdrawn.*

Increase in the Cases of Autism

Q21 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on whether the increase in the cases of autism is the result of changes in diagnostic practice or are there other factors responsible for the increase? (OAQ12601)

Q25 Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on the increase in incidences of autism in Wales? (OAQ12495)

Jane Hutt: Any increase in the numbers identified as having autism may, at least in part, be due to improvements in diagnosis and may also be due to changes in the way that autism spectrum disorder is defined. It is not clear whether or not there has been a real increase.

The Department of Health has asked the Medical Research Council to obtain a clear and comprehensive picture of what is currently known about the incidence, prevalence and causes of autism and how strong the evidence is that underpins that knowledge. The council's report is expected in the autumn. I fully support this initiative and will study the findings with interest.

Provision of Healthcare and Services through the Medium of Welsh

Q22 Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of healthcare and services through the medium of Welsh? (OAQ12554)

Jane Hutt: The Assembly is committed to raising the awareness of cultural and language issues for all frontline staff. It will achieve this by recognising the needs of Welsh speaking patients and staff when planning for the future workforce and in recruiting and training staff.

The Welsh Language Board and Assembly officials have been working closely together and, as a result, an all-Wales task group is to be established with the aim of developing a strategic approach to tackling Welsh language issues in health organisations in Wales.

This group will aim to improve and facilitate the provision of services through the medium of Welsh within the NHS and partnership organisations in Wales. We envisage that it will also have a monitoring role in this context.

‘Drinking of Alcohol by Children and Adolescents’

Q23 Helen Mary Jones: What additional steps will the Minister be taking following the European Union Council’s discussion of the recommendations ‘Drinking of alcohol by children and adolescents’ and the recent Stockholm conference on the same subject, for Wales? (OAQ12594)

Jane Hutt: We are already implementing much of what is being discussed. The Assembly’s unique, refocused and long-term strategic document, ‘Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales: A Partnership Approach’, covers alcohol. We are continually monitoring EU and other policy developments on alcohol and young people with a view to adapting the strategy.

The Strategy for Older People in Wales

Q24 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Would the Minister make a brief statement on the development of the strategy for older people in Wales? (OAQ12625) *Withdrawn.*

The Abolition of Health Authorities (Implications)

Q26 Pauline Jarman: What implications will the abolition of health authorities have for human resource planning in Wales? (OAQ12595) *Withdrawn.*

NHS Resource Allocation Review

Q27 Huw Lewis: Will the Minister make a statement on the work of the national steering group on the NHS resource allocation review and its implications for Wales? (OAQ12607)

Jane Hutt: Professor Townsend’s report on the NHS resource allocation review was considered by the Health and Social Services Committee on 4 July. While there were some reservations about endorsing the report prior to the completion of outstanding work, the Committee agreed that Professor Townsend’s report should be the basis for public consultation in October/November this year. A further report should be made to the Committee in the light of the responses. The aim is to introduce the new formula from 2003-04. In the meantime, the health inequalities fund will continue to be targeted to meet need, and its longer-term role will be considered.

The Committee also recognised the volume and depth of the work undertaken by Professor Townsend and his teams in the short time available. It was important that it was taken forward in parallel with other action to address social and economic deprivation within the Assembly and with the Westminster Government.

The Sexual Health Strategy

Q28 Gareth Jones: Would the Minister make a brief statement on the sexual health strategy? (OAQ12628) *Withdrawn.*

Tackling Health Problems in the Valleys

Q29 Geraint Davies: How does the Minister intend to tackle the health problems caused by deprivation in the Valleys? (OAQ12616) *Withdrawn.*

The In-patient Waiting List in Wales

Q30 David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on the level of the in-patient waiting list in Wales? (OAQ12548) *Withdrawn.*

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Cynllun Peilot o'r Fagloriaeth Gymreig

C7 Gareth Jones: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ryddhau manylion y bid a gyflwynwyd gan Gyd-bwyllgor Addysg Cymru i ddatblygu cynllun peilot o'r fagloriaeth Gymreig? (OAQ12581) [W]

Y Gweinidog dros Addysg a Dysgu Gydol Oes (Jane Davidson): Mae manylion tendr Cyd-bwyllgor Addysg Cymru yn fasnachol sensitif. Fel y dywedais yn fy natganiad yn y Cyfarfod Llawn ar 28 Mehefin, byddwn yn rhyddhau mwy o wybodaeth ynglŷn â'r model arfaethedig cyn gynted â phosibl.

Pilot Scheme for the Welsh Baccalaureate

Q7 Gareth Jones: Will the Minister release details of the bid presented by the Welsh Joint Education Committee to develop a pilot scheme for the Welsh baccalaureate? (OAQ12581) [W]

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): Details of the Welsh Joint Education Committee's tender are commercially sensitive. As I said in my statement to Plenary on 28 June, we will be releasing more information about the proposed model as soon as possible.

Improving School Buildings

Q8 Peter Black: How much money is available to local education authorities to improve school buildings this year? (OAQ12485) [R]

Jane Davidson: A total of £74.5 million capital is available to local authorities through general capital funding allocations and the New Deal: Additional Capital Funding for Schools programme in 2001-02 for improvements to school buildings. In addition, I expect authorities to spend around £21 million of funding carried forward from 2000-01.

Protecting Teachers from Violence and Abuse

Q9 David Davies: Will the Minister consider introducing a scheme, similar to the red card scheme adopted in national health service hospitals in England, in Welsh schools in order to protect teachers from violence and abuse? (OAQ12480)

Jane Davidson: I have heard of this pilot scheme in England. The Secretary of State for Health, Alan Milburn, announced last month that he would consider whether it should be applied more widely in the health service in England. I recognise that the scheme could have some merits for schools in Wales, but I would need to consider it more carefully and, in particular, how it would interrelate with our current school exclusion arrangements and the wider social inclusion agenda. It may, however, be an initiative that could feature in discussions that I envisage will take place later in the year with wider educational interests on the whole area of school disaffection.

Establishment of Learner Maintenance Bursaries

Q10 Ieuan Wyn Jones: When will the Cabinet make a decision relating to the establishment of learner maintenance bursaries in Wales? (OAQ12564)

Jane Davidson: The proposal to introduce learner maintenance bursaries from September 2002 onwards was one of 54 recommendations made by the independent investigation group on student hardship and funding in Wales. As with all the group's proposals, this recommendation is being examined in detail. It would cost a minimum additional £40 million a year to introduce. This will have to be considered during the current budget planning round, taking full account of the interests of learners and of the competing priorities that the Assembly faces.

Setting up Specialist Schools

Q11 Jonathan Morgan: Will the administration encourage the setting up of specialist schools in line with the forthcoming Education Bill? (OAQ12526)

Jane Davidson: The legal basis for specialist schools already exists. We have no plans to promote such schools in Wales.

Additional Resources Allocated to Further Education in Wales

Q12 Christine Gwyther: Can the Minister make a statement on any recent additional resources allocated to further education in Wales? (OAQ12508) *Withdrawn.*

Tackling Inequality

Q13 Mick Bates: Will the Minister outline her commitment to tackling inequality within further and higher education in Wales? (OAQ12576)

Jane Davidson: In my remit letters to the National Council for Education and Training for Wales and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, I stated my expectation that the councils would work to the Assembly's vision, values and guiding themes as set out in 'Betterwales.com'. Both councils, working together as Education and Learning Wales, are required to work actively to promote equality of opportunity, open access and diversity, and work closely with key equality organisations.

The aims are to:

- maximise participation in education and training by 16-year-olds to 19-year-olds;
- widen participation in learning by adults;
- respond to the need for post-16 Welsh medium provision;
- make appropriate services available for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- raise the level of basic skills; and
- ensure that people from ethnic minorities, those with caring responsibilities, and those returning to the labour market are encouraged and enabled to develop their abilities and potential to the full.

Provision of Radio Hearing Aids

Q14 Rosemary Butler: Has there been any progress in the provision of radio hearing aids for school children in Wales? (OAQ12511)

Jane Davidson: Primary responsibility for the diagnosis of hearing impairment and for the provision of hearing aids rests with health authorities and trusts, although local education authorities can also choose to provide such aids separately or jointly with health bodies through local partnership agreements.

The use of information technology in education is an area in which the Assembly has a strong interest. IT can make a real difference for children with special educational needs and their ability to access the curriculum. In addressing this, you will be pleased to note that I recently announced details of the 'ICT for Learning' strategy in Wales. This will provide £16 million to extend access to information and

communications technology facilities for schools and learners across Wales. As part of the strategy, £10 million will be available for computers and networking facilities in schools and additional ICT equipment for primary schools.

The National Assembly is inviting local education authorities and their local partners to submit proposals for the development of learning centres in their areas. As part of the strategy, funding of £0.5 million is available for ICT equipment for pupils with special educational needs. While it is for LEAs to determine their own priorities under their respective bids, a number of the bids thus far received under the strategy include the use of radio hearing aids.

Encouraging Schools in Wales to Link or Twin with Schools in Europe

Q15 Rosemary Butler: Does the Minister have any plans to encourage schools in Wales to link or twin with schools in Europe? (OAQ12488)

Jane Davidson: The Assembly's aim is to ensure that all schools place a greater emphasis on active citizenship and give young people fresh opportunities to engage in the wider world. We are increasing schools' access to information and communications technology facilities, which will enable them to establish links with schools in all parts of the world.

Social Exclusion within Education

Q16 Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister make a statement on social exclusion within education? (OAQ12571)

Jane Davidson: We know that the prospects are poor for disaffected children who may have behavioural difficulties, who do not attend school or are excluded from school. National Assembly circular 3/99, 'Pupil Support and Social Inclusion', contains practical advice for schools and local education authorities on preventative action and on tackling the issues surrounding school disaffection.

'Betterwales.com' set targets on reducing unauthorised absences and permanent exclusions from school by one third by 2004. These targets are supported by funding from the grants for education support and training programme, and £3 million was allocated to activity 19—school attendance and behaviour—in 2000-01. A total of £9.86 million has been made available for tackling social disadvantage for 2001-02. Local authorities decide how much of this is spent on school attendance and behaviour difficulties.

We intend to hold a major two-day conference later this year, bringing together representatives of all the major players, including headteachers, classroom teachers, trade unions, governors and local education authorities to consider and discuss the issues of pupil disaffection and social inclusion.

I will also shortly issue revised guidance to improve the educational outcomes for children looked after by local authorities, a group which is at the centre of the National Assembly for Wales's programmes to transform the quality of children's services. The guidance will link to National Assembly circular 4/2001, 'Children First Programme in Wales Guidance 2001-2002', and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, to ensure that children in need gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, healthcare and social care.

Discussions with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills

Q17 Christine Gwyther: What plans does the Minister have to discuss education issues affecting Wales with the newly appointed Secretary of State for Education and Skills? (OAQ12509) *Withdrawn.*

Protecting Rural Schools

Q18 Karen Sinclair: What measures is the Minister taking to protect rural schools? (OAQ12586)

Jane Davidson: Managing the supply of school places and making decisions about where to invest and where to rationalise are matters for local education authorities. Rural schools can be vulnerable to the threat of closure as a result of falling pupil numbers, high running costs and the challenge of delivering the national curriculum with only one or two teachers. There are a number of ways that such schools can become more viable. Collaboration with neighbouring schools or clustering, greater use of distance learning and federation of two or more schools are possible options. Some local education authorities are also seeking to expand the community use of school facilities by playgroups, after-school clubs, adult education and training, sporting or voluntary organisations or as information technology centres for the community. Local authorities are required to consider such approaches before concluding that closure is the right option.

There may well be circumstances where the best solution is for a school to close or for neighbouring schools to merge, and it would not be appropriate to offer blanket protection to rural schools, or any other schools, regardless of the quality of education being delivered and the costs involved. Where proposals attract objections and come to me for determination, they are decided on their merits. Community factors are taken into account, but my prime consideration has to be the quality of education.

Hybu Addysg Uwch drwy Gyfrwng y Gymraeg

C19 Cynog Dafis: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar y mesurau rhagweithiol y mae hi'n eu cymryd i hybu addysg uwch drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg? (OAQ12579) [W]

Jane Davidson: Fel y gŵyr yr Aelod, mae pob sefydliad addysg uwch yn gorff annibynnol, hunanlywodraethol sydd yn gyfrifol am bennu ei faterion gweinyddol ac academaidd ei hun, gan gynnwys dewis pa gyrsiau i'w darparu a phenderfynu a gynigir hwy drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg ai peidio.

Serch hynny, yn fy llythyr cyfarwyddyd ar gyfer 2001-02 i Gyngor Cyllido Addysg Uwch Cymru, un o'r blaenoriaethau a nodais ar gyfer sector addysg uwch Cymru oedd y dylai sefydliadau gyfrannu at ddatblygiad dwyieithrwydd yng Nghymru.

Mae'r cyngor yn cefnogi datblygu addysg uwch drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg drwy nifer o wahanol fesurau a mentrau, gan gynnwys: talu premiwm i sefydliadau addysg uwch am gofrestrïadau i gyrsiau/modiwlau drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg; cyllid i gefnogi sefydliadau addysg uwch wrth iddynt gyflwyno cynlluniau strategol drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg; cyfrannu at gost uned ddysgu drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg Prifysgol Cymru a sefydlwyd yn ddiweddar; ac ariannu hyfforddiant athrawon Cymraeg neu drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg. Disgwylir i'r cyngor gyflwyno cynigion ar ehangu'r ddarpariaeth drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg i mi erbyn Hydref 2001.

Promoting Welsh-medium Higher Education

Q19 Cynog Dafis: Will the Minister make a statement regarding the proactive measures that she is taking to promote Welsh-medium higher education? (OAQ12579) [W]

Jane Davidson: As the Assembly Member is aware, all higher education institutions are independent autonomous bodies with sole responsibility for determining their own internal administrative and academic affairs, including the courses that they choose to provide and whether they are delivered through the medium of Welsh.

However, in my letter of guidance for 2001-02 to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, one of the priorities that I have identified for the Welsh higher education sector is that institutions should contribute to the development of bilingual capacity within Wales.

HEFCW is supporting the development of Welsh-medium higher education through a range of measures and initiatives, including: the payment of a premium to higher education institutions for enrolments on

Welsh-medium courses/modules; funding to support higher education institutions in the implementation of their Welsh-medium strategic plans; contributing towards the cost of the recently established University of Wales Welsh-medium teaching unit; and specifically funding Welsh-medium/language teacher training. HEFCW is due to present proposals to me on expanding Welsh-medium provision still further by October 2001.

Introducing Specialist Schools in Wales

Q20 David Melding: Would the Minister make a statement on the administration's plans to introduce specialist schools in Wales? (OAQ12528)

Jane Davidson: We have no plans to introduce specialist schools in Wales.

Teacher Recruitment in North Wales

Q21 Alison Halford: Would the Minister make a statement on teacher recruitment in north Wales? (OAQ12505)

Jane Davidson: There is no evidence in Wales as a whole or in north Wales that schools generally face significant and immediate recruitment difficulties. Teacher vacancies in Wales remain low. In January 2001, there were just 99 teacher vacancies, which constitutes a vacancy rate of 0.4 per cent.

We are not complacent, however. We are offering incentives for initial teacher training courses where we have had difficulty recruiting, and these are having an effect. Latest figures show a 25 per cent rise in applications compared with this time last year.

Widening Participation in Further and Higher Education

Q22 Jocelyn Davies: What specific measures will the Minister introduce to widen participation in further and higher education among people from the most socially disadvantaged areas of Wales? (OAQ12559)

Jane Davidson: The Assembly is committed to widening access to post-16 education for all those who have the ability to benefit from it, particularly by encouraging participation by students from low income or socially disadvantaged backgrounds, as well other under-represented groups. To assist in this, the Assembly provides all publicly-funded further and higher education institutions in Wales with hardship funds. The purpose of these funds is to help those students who would otherwise be prevented from entering post-16 education because of financial reasons, and those who, having embarked on a course of study, subsequently experience financial difficulties.

I have already announced £20 million for the academic year 2001-02 for this purpose. It is a direct response to the independent group on student hardship's call for an increase to access and hardship funds this financial year and is the first recommendation to be carried through by the Assembly. I was particularly pleased to have been able to make the announcement before the recess, so that institutions can be notified and guidance provided to enable everyone to be informed for the start of the new academic year.

The Member will also be aware of the statement that I made to Plenary on 26 June following publication of the report of the independent investigation into student hardship and funding in Wales. The Assembly Cabinet will be responding to the report's recommendations as soon as possible.

The Assembly also looks to the National Council for Education and Training for Wales and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales to help to meet its aims of widening access to, and participation in, all post-16 education learning, particularly in areas of disadvantage. These two councils, working together as Education and Learning Wales, will be expected to use their respective programmes and initiatives, as appropriate, to:

- maximise participation in education and training by 16-year-olds to 19-year-olds;
- widen participation in learning by adults;
- respond to the need for post-16 Welsh-medium provision;
- make appropriate services available to people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- raise the level of basic skills; and
- ensure that people from ethnic minorities, those with caring responsibilities, and those returning to the labour market are encouraged and enabled to develop their abilities and potential to the full.

Resources Available to Students in Wales (Rees Report)

Q23 David Lloyd: What additional resources are available to students in Wales following on from the publication of the Rees report? (OAQ12578)

Jane Davidson: The Assembly had already begun to address a number of student funding issues before the student hardship review group finally reported. The group readily acknowledges in its report that the Assembly has made significant additional funding available for access and hardship grants.

I announced on Monday 9 July that the Assembly Cabinet was taking immediate action to tackle student hardship by increasing student access and hardship funds for the coming academic year to £20 million, as recommended in the report of the independent group on student hardship. It is a direct response to the group's call for an increase to access and hardship funds this financial year and is the first recommendation to be carried through by the Assembly. I was particularly pleased to have been able to make the announcement before the recess, so that institutions can be notified and guidance provided to enable everyone to be informed for the start of the new academic year.

As I stated in Plenary on 26 June, all of the report's recommendations will be examined in proper detail and tested rigorously and realistically from every standpoint before any decisions are made on implementation. The financial implications will have to be addressed during the current budget planning round.

Ymestyn y Ddarpariaeth Addysg drwy Gyfrwng y Gymraeg

C24 Owen John Thomas: Pa gamau y mae'r Gweinidog yn eu cymryd i sicrhau bod digon o staff dwyieithog ar gael â hyfforddiant priodol er mwyn ymestyn y ddarpariaeth addysg drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg i blant rhwng tair a phedair blwydd oed? (OAQ12523) [W]

Jane Davidson: Mae panel ymgynghorol y blynyddoedd cynnar wedi sefydlu nifer o is-grwpiau, gan gynnwys un yn benodol i ystyried y nifer o staff â hyfforddiant a'r cymwysterau priodol sydd ar gael i osod targedau a hysbysu datblygiad strategaeth hyfforddi blynyddoedd cynnar, yn unol â rheolau a safonau cenedlaethol yn y dyfodol.

Os ydym am gyflawni darpariaeth o'r safon uchaf, rhaid i ni i gyd sicrhau bod cyfleoedd yn y blynyddoedd cynnar yn cael eu harwain a'u meithrin gan staff cymwysedig sydd yn gofalu yn ogystal ag addysgu, beth bynnag fo'r cyfrwng.

Extending the Provision for Welsh-language Medium Education

Q24 Owen John Thomas: What action is the Minister taking to ensure that there are enough bilingual staff available and suitable training to extend the provision for Welsh-language medium education for children between three and four-years-old? (OAQ12523) [W]

Jane Davidson: The early years advisory panel has established several sub-groups, including one specifically to consider the availability of sufficient suitably trained and qualified staff, to set targets and

inform the development of an early years training strategy, in line with future national regulations and standards.

If we are to achieve the highest standards of provision, we must all ensure that early years opportunities are guided and nurtured by suitably qualified staff who care as well as educate, within whichever medium that may be.

Educational Measures Set Out in the Queen's Speech

Q25 Jonathan Morgan: Would the Minister make a statement on the administration's attitude to the educational measures set out in the Queen's Speech? (OAQ12525) *Withdrawn.*

Marking Science Year in Wales

Q26 Gareth Jones: What events are being organised to mark science year in Wales? (OAQ12566)

Jane Davidson: It is clearly important to raise standards in science and to encourage more young people to pursue science as a career or study option post-16. My officials are currently in discussion with a range of organisations about proposed events for science year in Wales, and I expect to make a detailed announcement soon.

The Role of the Education System in Tackling Racism in Wales

Q27 Janice Gregory: Could the Minister make a statement on the role of the education system in tackling racism in Wales? (OAQ12512) *Withdrawn.*

Students with Special Educational Needs

Q28 Mick Bates: What plans have been made to address the problems faced by students with special educational needs within Welsh schools? (OAQ12575)

Jane Davidson: Measures aimed at improving provision for all children with special educational needs in schools in Wales are included in the Assembly's published special educational needs action programme for Wales, 'Shaping the Future for Special Education', which can be found in the Assembly Library.

A number of the key measures outlined in the action programme have since been underpinned by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, which received Royal Assent on 11 May. The Assembly, in conjunction with the Welsh advisory group on special educational needs, is now working towards the production of a revised special educational needs code of practice in Wales to incorporate statutory guidance to schools, statutory agencies and others on their new and existing responsibilities for children with special educational needs. I hope to be in a position in the near future to confirm timetable arrangements for this important next step.

Furthermore, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 brings to the statute book the recommendations of the report of the disability rights taskforce on civil rights for disabled people, 'From Exclusion to Inclusion', which was published in late 1999. The Act introduces new disability rights duties on local education authorities and schools—including independent schools—in England and Wales. These new duties are:

- not to treat disabled pupils less favourably, without justification, than pupils who are not disabled;
- to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled pupils are not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to pupils who are not disabled in their access to education; and

- to plan strategically and make progress in increasing physical accessibility to schools' premises and to the curriculum.

The Act also places similar duties on further education institutions, higher education institutions, adult education and youth services provision secured by local education authorities. The Disability Rights Commission has functions under the Act to prepare codes of practice to explain and illustrate the legislation to providers of education, disabled people and others. It has established two reference groups to assist it in this process, both of which include strong representation from Wales.

Extra Funding in the Further Education Sector in Wales

Q29 Richard Edwards: Can the Minister give a progress report on the allocation of extra funding in the further education sector in Wales? (OAQ12507) *Withdrawn.*

Improving Standards in Secondary Schools in Wales

Q30 Huw Lewis: Will the Minister make a statement on plans to improve standards in secondary schools in Wales? (OAQ12568)

Jane Davidson: We are working closely with Estyn and the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales on raising the standards of all schools in Wales, and we have set a number of challenging national targets against which we will be measuring progress. Earlier this year, I made additional funds available to local education authorities to put in place programmes to tackle improvements in key stage 3 and to support the transition from key stage 2 by reducing junior class sizes. This year, the extra funding amounts to £20 million, rising to £25 million in 2002-03 and £32 million in 2003-04. In addition, Estyn is developing a framework that focuses on raising levels of literacy and numeracy in secondary schools and builds on the effective work undertaken in the primary sector.

We are also working closely with the Welsh Local Government Association as part of our Partnership Council arrangements on narrowing the gap between schools. The narrowing the gap group is due to report to the Assembly in March 2002, and I am confident that it will bring forward recommendations that will not only provide an insight into the nature of the problem but also into how it should be tackled. The group will provide a steer on how existing good practice can be built on and further developed to benefit all schools.

Underpinning our standards programme are the links that we have with local education authorities through the education strategic plan process. The plan enables local education authorities to identify their key priorities and activities and to set them in a strategic framework that delivers a school improvement programme that is matched to local needs, but at the same time fits with the national standards programme.

Questions to the House Committee

Assembly Members' Offices Equipped with Video Conferencing System

Q6 Alison Halford: Would the Deputy Presiding Officer make a statement about the number of Assembly Members' offices equipped with a working video conferencing system? (OAQ12534) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Marek): I can confirm that desktop video conferencing has been installed in 27 Assembly Members' offices to date. A remaining 17 Members are awaiting the installation of additional communications links that will enable their constituency offices to be connected to the bay for desktop video conferencing installation to be completed.