

## **Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 14 June 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**

#### **Rise in NHS Out-patient Waiting List**

**Q7 David Melding:** Will the Minister make a statement on the policy implications of the rise in NHS out-patient waiting list figures announced in May? (OAQ11909)

**The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt):** My policies have resulted in a clear downward trend in waiting lists, with falls in five of the seven most recent months. Implementing the key recommendation of the waiting times strategy development group report will continue this improvement and ensure that only patients who need to see a consultant go on to outpatient lists and that appropriate alternatives are developed.

#### **Reducing Waiting Lists**

**Q8 Janet Davies:** What steps will the Minister take to ensure that waiting lists are reduced? (OAQ11913)

**Jane Hutt:** We will continue building on the success of last year, when waiting lists reduced by 10,000 patients. We will shortly be launching our waiting times strategy in partnership with the NHS to focus on priority services backed with substantial increases in resources.

Performance will be closely monitored through the year, and the Innovations in Care programme has now expanded to drive the change and innovation needed in the NHS in Wales to achieve sustainable reductions in waiting times.

#### **Delays in Receiving Treatment**

**Q9 Owen John Thomas:** Is the Minister aware of delays experienced by patients awaiting treatment at the accident and emergency unit of University Hospital, Cardiff? (OAQ11904)

**Jane Hutt:** Emergency units are by nature demand led and, unfortunately, this sometimes leads to delays for patients at times of peak activity and this has been the case recently at the University Hospital of Wales. Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust is continually looking at ways of minimising the time that patients wait for treatment at the emergency unit. There is a proposal to site the main primary care out-of-hours centre alongside the accident and emergency unit, which should assist in the management of emergency patients. The trust is also updating and extending the role of nurse practitioners, as well as increasing their numbers, to help reduce waiting times.

### Rise in NHS In-patient Waiting List

**Q10 David Melding:** Will the Minister make a statement on the policy implications of the rise in NHS in-patient waiting list figures announced in May? (OAQ11910)

**Jane Hutt:** My policy has been to exert downward pressure on waiting lists and waiting times, and numbers on the list have fallen in nine of the last 11 months.

The rise in May is in line with previous years. In-patient and daycase waiting lists over the last three years increased in April compared with March. However, despite this expected volatility in waiting lists at this time of the year, in-patient and daycase waiting lists fell in two health authorities.

### Darpariaeth Gwasanaethau drwy Gyfrwng y Gymraeg

**C11 Gareth Jones:** A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar ddarpariaeth gwasanaethau drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg yn y gwasanaeth iechyd yng Nghymru? (OAQ11931) [W]

**Jane Hutt:** Yr oedd adroddiad Cyngor Defnyddwyr Cymru, a gyhoeddwyd y llynedd, yn amlygu'r diffyg darpariaeth o wasanaethau drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg o fewn yr NHS yng Nghymru. Mae'r Cynulliad yn gwbl ymrwymedig i godi'r ymwybyddiaeth o faterion sydd yn ymwneud â diwylliant a'r iaith ar gyfer pob un o'i staff rheng-flaen. Yr ydym yn bwriadu cyflawni hyn drwy gymryd i ystyriaeth anghenion cleifion a staff sydd yn siarad Cymraeg wrth gynllunio ar gyfer gweithlu'r dyfodol mewn meysydd megis recriwtio, cadw a hyfforddi staff. Mae Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg a swyddogion y Cynulliad yn gweithio mewn partneriaeth ar hyn o bryd, er mwyn bwrw ymlaen â'r materion hyn. Cyn bo hir byddant yn sefydlu tasglu Cymru-gyfan a fydd yn llunio strategaethau i fwrw ymlaen â materion sydd yn ymwneud â'r iaith Gymraeg o fewn yr NHS yng Nghymru.

### Provision of Services through the Welsh Language

**Q11 Gareth Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of services through the Welsh language in the health service in Wales? (OAQ11931) [W]

**Jane Hutt:** The Welsh Consumer Council report, which was published last year, highlighted the lack of provision of Welsh language services within the NHS in Wales. The Assembly is fully committed to raising the awareness of cultural and language issues for all front-line staff. We aim to achieve that by taking account of the needs of Welsh-speaking patients and staff when planning for the future workforce in areas such as recruiting, retaining and training staff. The Welsh Language Board and Assembly officials are currently working in partnership to take forward these issues. They will establish an all-Wales task group shortly to work strategically to take forward issues relating to the Welsh language within the NHS in Wales.

### Progress of the NHS Plan for Wales

**Q12 Christine Gwyther:** Will the Minister give a progress report on the NHS plan for Wales? (OAQ11906) *Withdrawn.*

### Differences in Treating Alzheimer's Disease

**Q13 Alun Cairns:** Has the Minister undertaken research into any differences that may exist between the private sector and the NHS in treating Alzheimer's disease? (OAQ11944)

**Jane Hutt:** The National Assembly for Wales is not responsible for health care outside the national health service. We have undertaken no research on private sector health care and have no plans to do so.

### **Oncology and Radiotherapy Services in Withybush Hospital**

**Q14 Richard Edwards:** Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of oncology and radiotherapy services in Withybush Hospital? (OAQ11911) *Withdrawn.*

### **Recruiting and Retaining Nurses in Wales**

**Q15 Nick Bourne:** What progress is being made towards recruiting and retaining nurses in Wales? (OAQ11936)

**Jane Hutt:** Funding has been secured for return to practice courses for nurses whose practice has lapsed and who need retraining before returning to work in Wales. An additional 255 nurses, above and beyond the workforce planning requirement, will be trained on an annual recurring basis. This is a significant investment, representing an increase in student numbers in excess of 30 per cent from 1999 commissions. It is anticipated that the students will take up employment within NHS Wales, which will aid in addressing staff shortages and thus improve service delivery and responsiveness. Promotion of employee-friendly policies by NHS trusts will aid retention.

### **Private Medical Practice within the Health Service in Wales**

**Q16 Richard Edwards:** Will the Minister make a statement on private medical practice within the health service in Wales? (OAQ11907) *Withdrawn.*

### **Reducing Waiting Lists in Wales**

**Q17 Geraint Davies:** Will the Minister outline the progress made to date towards reducing waiting lists in Wales? (OAQ11912) *Withdrawn.*

### **Loss of Private Residential and Nursing Care Beds**

**Q18 Alun Cairns:** Will the Minister make a statement on how many private residential and nursing care beds have been lost due to closure of homes this year? (OAQ11937)

**Jane Hutt:** Latest figures reported to the Assembly show that, on 31 March 2000, there were 334 fewer nursing home places and 266 more residential care home places compared to 31 March 1999. The number of nursing homes fell by 20 between 31 March 1999 and 31 March 2000, while the number of large residential homes increased by three. There were 74 fewer small residential care homes (homes with three or less beds).

I am very much aware of the problems, including home closures, currently facing independent care home providers in Wales and will continue my regular dialogue with their representatives. Officials are also discussing these issues with local authorities who have the responsibility for commissioning places in independent care homes in their areas.

### **Health Benefits of Drinking Milk**

**Q19 Peter Rogers:** Has the Minister had any discussions with the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals about the health benefits of drinking milk? (OAQ11933) [R]

**Jane Hutt:** I am not aware of any representations having been made to me by this organisation.

Milk is a valuable source of calcium, protein, riboflavin and vitamin A and can contribute to a healthy, balanced diet. Because it is also high in fat, the current nutritional advice is that it should be consumed in a low fat version whenever possible.

### Recruitment Exercises

**Q20 Ieuan Wyn Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on any recruitment exercises currently underway in the NHS in Wales? (OAQ11899) *Withdrawn.*

### Vaccination Programmes Targeted at the Homeless and Travelling Communities

**Q21 William Graham:** Will the Minister make a statement concerning the development of vaccination programmes for tetanus, polio, hepatitis B and influenza targeted at the homeless and our travelling communities? (OAQ11892)

**Jane Hutt:** As part of our effort to protect the population from ill-health, we have given priority to increasing the numbers of those immunised. The provision of services for the homeless and travellers is part of a holistic approach by health and local authorities. Significant progress has been made in the registration of homeless people and travellers with GPs. This is an important step in improving immunisation uptake. An all-Wales immunisation co-ordinators group has been created to maximise co-operation between health authorities.

Their efforts are complemented by local development schemes, which permit health authorities to aid general practitioners to provide quality care to rough sleepers and travellers. The Assembly's model development scheme is designed to ensure that these groups gain optimum advantage from the health and social care system, and become and remain healthy. GPs can be offered incentives to devote additional practice time to such patients and they, along with other primary care practitioners, are encouraged to provide necessary treatment and investigations to improve health or to prevent disease.

### High Quality Healthcare

**Q22 David Lloyd:** What progress has been made towards improving access to high quality healthcare? (OAQ11901) *Withdrawn.*

### Waiting List for Orthopaedic Surgery

**Q23 William Graham:** Will the Minister confirm that the waiting list for orthopaedic surgery in a number of hospitals in Wales exceeds two years? (OAQ11891)

**Jane Hutt:** As a result of previous underinvestment, there are still a number of hospitals in Wales where patients have to wait over two years for orthopaedic surgery. This is unacceptable and I have targeted resources on reducing the long waits as a matter of urgency. We are now seeing a fall in the number of people affected, with the number waiting over 18 months falling for the third successive month.

Health authorities have been developing specific plans to improve the orthopaedic service with the assistance of the Innovations in Care programme.

### Health Damage Caused by Air Pollution

**Q24 Brian Hancock:** Will the Minister make a statement on the extent of health damage caused by air pollution? (OAQ11921) *Withdrawn.*

### Darpariaeth Leol ar Gyfer Dioddefwyr Sglerosis Ymledol

**C25 Owen John Thomas:** Pa ddarpariaeth leol sydd mewn golwg ar gyfer dioddefwyr sglerosis ymledol de Cymru i gymryd lle'r gwasanaeth a roddir yn awr gan Gartref Danygraig, Porthcawl? (OAQ11902) [W]

**Jane Hutt:** Yr wyf yn deall bod y Gymdeithas Sglerosis Ymledol wedi lleihau ei defnydd o'r gwasanaethau yn Danygraig yn sylweddol. Mae trafodaethau ar ddyfodol Danygraig yn parhau ac yr wyf yn cael fy hysbysu o'u hynt. Mater i'w benderfynu yn lleol yw'r modd y mae gwasanaethau seibiant yn cael eu darparu ar gyfer pawb sydd ag anabledau sylweddol.

#### **Local Provision for Multiple Sclerosis Sufferers**

**Q25 Owen John Thomas:** What local provision for multiple sclerosis sufferers in south Wales will replace the service currently provided by Cartref Danygraig, Porthcawl? (OAQ11902) [W]

**Jane Hutt:** I understand that the Multiple Sclerosis Society has substantially reduced its call on the services offered at Danygraig. Discussions about the future of Danygraig are continuing and I am kept informed. The way in which respite services are provided for all those with significant disabilities is for local determination.

#### **Development of the Medical Campus at Bangor**

**Q26 Gareth Jones:** Will the Minister make a brief statement on the development of the medical campus at Bangor? (OAQ11917) *Withdrawn.*

#### **Health Problems Caused by Deprivation in the Valleys**

**Q27 Geraint Davies:** How does the Minister intend to tackle the health problems caused by deprivation in the Valleys? (OAQ11918) *Withdrawn.*

#### **Information and Communications Technology**

**Q28 Dafydd Wigley:** Will the Minister make a statement on the use of information and communications technology in the NHS? (OAQ11898) *Withdrawn.*

#### **Reducing Waiting Times for Cardiac Patients**

**Q29 Nick Bourne:** What progress is being made towards reducing the waiting times for cardiac patients in Welsh hospitals? (OAQ11935)

**Jane Hutt:** We are reducing the number of people facing long waits for cardiac surgery. The number waiting over 15 months has been cut from 157 in August 2000 to 69 in April 2001.

I am now aiming to reduce the maximum wait for routine cardiac surgery to 12 months. To assist in achieving this, I have allocated an extra £2 million in the current year. Contracts have been made with the Hammersmith Hospital and a provider in Manchester and additional cases will be undertaken at the University Hospital of Wales and at Morryston Hospital as the first part of the upsizing, which will be fully operational in the next financial year.

#### **Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust**

**Q30 Dafydd Wigley:** Will the Minister make a brief statement on the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust? (OAQ11920) *Withdrawn.*

## Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

### Athrawon Trwyddedig ym Maes Addysg Blynyddoedd Cynnar

**C6 Owen John Thomas:** Faint o'r athrawon sydd yn gweithio ym maes addysg blynyddoedd cynnar (tair a phedair oed) sydd yn athrawon trwyddedig? (OAQ11886) [W]

**Y Gweinidog dros Addysg a Dysgu Gydol Oes (Jane Davidson):** Yn y sector a gynhelir, rhaid i'r holl unigolion a gyflogir fel athrawon fod â statws athro cymwysedig.

### Licensed Teachers in Early Years Education

**Q6 Owen John Thomas:** How many of the teachers working in the field of early years education (three and four years old) are licensed teachers? (OAQ11886) [W]

**The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson):** In the maintained sector, all individuals employed as teachers must have qualified teacher status.

### Reviewing Teacher Workloads

**Q7 Gareth Jones:** What plans does the Minister have to review teacher workloads in Wales? (OAQ11958)

**Jane Davidson:** A study of teacher workloads in Wales and England is being carried out by PriceWaterhouseCoopers for the Department for Education and Employment. Recommendations on ways to reduce workload will be made to the school teachers' review body for it to consider, along with other issues, in its 2002 report.

Schools in Wales will be included in the study and the National Assembly is represented on the study steering group.

### Rural Schools Policy

**Q8 Nick Bourne:** Will the Minister give a definite timescale for when the issue of a rural schools policy will be brought to Plenary for discussion? (OAQ11928)

**Jane Davidson:** I have made it clear that, in considering policy for rural schools, I wish to take into account the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's review on the supply of school places. The Committee's report is due to be debated in Plenary on 10 July. In responding to the report, I will set out my thinking on the development of policy for rural schools.

### Cancellation of Community College Courses

**Q9 Williams Graham:** Will the Minister make a statement concerning the number of community college courses that are cancelled due to insufficient people enrolling for them? (OAQ11887)

**Jane Davidson:** There are no community colleges in Wales and education legislation makes no provision for them. I assume, therefore, that the question concerns adult continuing education or adult community education, provision for which is made through local education authorities and funded by the National Council for Education and Training for Wales. However, there is no information held by the Assembly on the number of such courses that are cancelled due to insufficient enrolments.

### New Style A Levels

**Q10 David Davies:** What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that the new style A Levels do not place unnecessary burdens on students? (OAQ11890)

**Jane Davidson:** The reforms that were put in place for September 2000 are designed to increase the breadth of learning for students post-16 and to reinforce messages about parity of academic and vocational qualifications. That is essential for our future economic prosperity. The new qualifications are also flexible enough to allow each student to make further choices after one year of study. The traditional, highly specialised sixth form curriculum is not enough.

I remain committed to these reforms. However, in bedding in the most fundamental reforms to advanced level qualifications for 50 years, there are likely to be teething problems. We must ensure that the new qualifications do not place unreasonable burdens on students, or on schools and colleges. A review of the early lessons from the implementation of the new qualifications is already in hand. I will listen carefully to any concerns that are raised and will take any action that I believe is appropriate.

I will write to you shortly with an update on the current situation.

### Discussions with Estyn Representatives

**Q11 Mick Bates:** Has the Minister had any further discussions with Estyn representatives in relation to strategies being implemented to address the issues raised in Estyn's 1999-2000 annual report? (OAQ11965)

**Jane Davidson:** I met with the chief inspector on two occasions to agree Estyn's remit for 2001-02 and I am satisfied that the programme of work agreed in the remit takes account of the key issues identified in the chief inspector's report for 1999-2000. I also meet regularly with the chief inspector to review progress against the remit.

### Co-ordination of School Holidays

**Q12 Christine Chapman:** Will the Minister make a statement on the co-ordination of school holidays throughout Wales? (OAQ11927)

**Jane Davidson:** Statutory responsibility for setting the dates of school terms and holidays rests with local education authorities in Wales. I understand that the Association of Directors of Education in Wales is considering the opportunities for introducing unified term dates across Wales.

### Additional Resources Allocated to Further Education in Wales

**Q13 Christine Gwyther:** Will the Minister make a statement on any recent additional resources allocated to further education in Wales? (OAQ11883) *Withdrawn.*

### Number of Books and Computers Obtained through Consumer Product Vouchers

**Q14 William Graham:** Will the Minister make a statement concerning the number of books and computers obtained by schools in Wales from the collection of consumer product vouchers? (OAQ11888)

**Jane Davidson:** That information is not collected by the National Assembly, but I am aware that schools supplement their resources in this way. While such schemes may offer valuable opportunities for schools to add to their resources, they can give rise to other issues, for instance, in the case of computers, compatibility with existing equipment and the longer-term cost of ownership.

### Partnership Agreement

**Q15 Cynog Dafis:** How does the Minister assess the progress made towards fulfilling the commitments relating to education and lifelong learning contained in the partnership agreement? (OAQ11955)

**Jane Davidson:** I am pleased to state that we have made substantial progress on our commitments, as was made clear by the First Minister's formal report to the Assembly on 20 March about the progress that the administration has made across the board on implementing 'Putting Wales First: A Partnership for the People of Wales'. I report regularly to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on progress with individual commitments, including where there are changes to the detail or timing of the proposals, such as on the Welsh baccalaureate or on the report of the student hardship review.

As the First Minister's report stated, I intend to bring proposals to Plenary before the summer recess in respect of smaller rural schools in the light of the conclusions of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's investigation into surplus school places. My proposals for the forthcoming budget planning round will be made in the light of the commitments that we have made in 'Putting Wales First'.

### Investigation into Student Hardship

**Q16 Pauline Jarman:** Will the recommendations of the independent investigation into student hardship adopted by the National Assembly be funded from September 2001 as promised in the partnership agreement? (OAQ11949) *Withdrawn.*

### Discussions with the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

**Q17 Peter Rogers:** Has the Minister had any discussions with the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals about the distribution of campaign material to schoolchildren in Wales? (OAQ11963) [R]

**Jane Davidson:** No. It is for headteachers and school governing bodies to decide what material children in their schools have access to.

### Career Services in Wales

**Q18 Christine Gwyther:** What quality assurance mechanisms are in place for career services in Wales? (OAQ11884) *Withdrawn.*

### Extra Funding in the Further Education Sector in Wales

**Q19 Richard Edwards:** Can the Minister give a progress report on the allocation of extra funding in the further education sector in Wales? (OAQ11877) *Withdrawn.*

### Special Educational Needs Legislation

**Q20 Janet Ryder:** Would the Minister give an update on the situation with regard to the forthcoming special educational needs legislation? (OAQ11961) *Withdrawn.*

### Teacher Recruitment

**Q21 David Davies:** What steps is the Minister taking to tackle the problems of teacher recruitment? (OAQ11879)

**Jane Davidson:** Statistics collected by the Assembly do not indicate significant teacher recruitment difficulties in Wales.



However, we have recognised the need to maintain and improve recruitment to postgraduate initial teacher training courses. I have extended and simplified the training incentives, which offer training and teaching grants of up to £10,000. These are having an effect—latest figures show a rise in applications of nearly 23 per cent compared with this time last year.

### **Applications for the Threshold Payment**

**Q22 Brian Gibbons:** What proportion of eligible teachers in Wales have applied for the threshold payment? (OAQ11880) [R]

**Jane Davidson:** Figures from the Department for Education and Employment indicate that over 14,000 teachers in Wales have applied for the threshold assessment. That equates to approximately 85 per cent of all teachers in Wales who were eligible to apply.

### **Reducing the Amount of Paperwork Faced by Teachers**

**Q23 Nick Bourne:** What developments has the Minister made to reduce the amount of paperwork faced by teachers in Wales? (OAQ11929)

**Jane Davidson:** The draft report on reducing bureaucratic burdens on schools will be considered by the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on 13 June. Its aim is to put in place action for a sustainable policy of minimising burdens, which has the support of key players in school education. The final report is due to be debated in Plenary on 10 July. If it is approved, its conclusions and proposed action will be disseminated to schools and teachers.

### **Inquiry into Student Hardship**

**Q24 Mick Bates:** Will the Minister give a progress report on the inquiry being made into student hardship? (OAQ11964)

**Jane Davidson:** The independent investigation group on student hardship and funding in Wales has completed its investigation and publishes its report today, Thursday 14 June.

### **Problems of Student Maintenance and Support**

**Q25 Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** What are the main problems inherent in the current system of student maintenance and support identified by the independent investigation? (OAQ11957)

**Jane Davidson:** The independent investigation group on student hardship and funding in Wales publishes its report today (Thursday, 14 June 2001). I have not yet had an opportunity to study the report in detail, but I will consider its findings and recommendations and make a statement to Plenary on 26 June.

### **Community-based Adult Education**

**Q26 Cynog Dafis:** What measures has the Minister introduced to ensure that community-based adult education is promoted and developed across Wales? (OAQ11956)

**Jane Davidson:** In its remit letter, I gave the National Council for Education and Training for Wales the responsibility of widening participation in learning by adults of all ages, particularly in areas of disadvantage. I also gave it responsibility to use its programmes to create the infrastructure to support human resource development across Wales, increase personal fulfilment and give individuals more control over their future.

The council will re-align the pattern of learning and skills provision across Wales with its own needs assessment. In doing so, it will work closely with local education authorities, the business community,

the voluntary sector and others to plan for significant improvements in the integrated provision of adult and community learning.

### **Status of Citizenship in the National Curriculum**

**Q27 Richard Edwards:** Can the Minister make a statement on the current status of citizenship in the national curriculum? (OAQ11878) *Withdrawn.*

### **Therapy Services within Special Needs Schools**

**Q28 David Melding:** Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of therapy services within special needs schools in Wales? (OAQ11882)

**Jane Davidson:** Responsibility for meeting the primary health care needs, including the range of therapy needs, of the general population rests with the health authority under the National Health Service Act 1977. However, in cases involving children in receipt of a statement of special educational needs, local education authorities have the ultimate duty, under the Education Act 1996, to ensure that any provision specified in a statement of special educational needs is met. That includes therapy provision where the health authority fails to make that provision. Reconciling which authority is responsible for addressing shortfalls in provision is, however, less than straightforward in many cases.

That is why the Assembly has placed stronger emphasis on the need for even closer collaborative working between health and local authorities in the planning, commissioning and delivery of key health, social and educational services for children and adults alike. Significant additional resources have been provided by the Assembly in recent years for health and education services generally in Wales. The Health Act 1999 also provided for the pooling of NHS resources with other statutory partners to promote closer working practices. Subsequent guidance entitled 'Flexibilities for Joint Working between Health and Local Government' was issued by the National Assembly last November.

Also, last November saw the publication of the report entitled 'Provision for Children with Speech and Language Needs in England and Wales—Facilitating Communication Between Education and Health Services'. The report, which resulted from a detailed research study across England and Wales sponsored jointly by the Department for Education and Employment, the Department of Health and the Assembly, examines the barriers to closer collaborative working and makes challenging recommendations for improvement.

Assembly health and education officials are in the process of considering the report and its possible implications for service delivery in Wales. The views of the therapy working group in Wales (a group established as a sub-group of the Welsh Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs) are being sought as part of that process. It is already clear from the report that, while there is a need for more therapy posts to be created where shortfalls exist, there also needs to be much stronger commitment between statutory agencies in terms of agreeing joint priorities if local or regional partnerships are to deliver sustainable improvements. The Assembly will consider over the coming months what more needs to be done centrally to further promote collaborative practices in Wales.

### **Investigation into Student Hardship**

**Q29 Pauline Jarman:** How much money has been set aside to implement recommendations drawn up by the independent investigation into student hardship? (OAQ11954) *Withdrawn.*

### **Improving the WJEC's Relationship with the Assembly**

**Q30 Alun Cairns:** What discussions has the Minister had with the Welsh Joint Education Committee on improving its relationship with the Assembly? (OAQ11945)

**Jane Davidson:** The National Assembly enjoys an excellent relationship with the WJEC. At our meeting on 23 April the chairman of the WJEC and I agreed that we should have regular meetings at least twice a year and more often if necessary. Assembly officials also have excellent relations and regular day-to-day dealings with WJEC officers.

## **Questions to the House Committee**

### **Access to Information for Groups Outside the Assembly**

**Q7 Janet Ryder:** What steps have been taken to improve access to information for groups outside the Assembly? (OAQ11941)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Marek):** There have been a number of developments, including:

- the opening of the Assembly at the Pierhead visitor and education centre;
- the establishment of the publications centre;
- the creation of an electronic information register for the public;
- the redevelopment of the Assembly's website;
- the issue of a new range of information leaflets;
- the expansion of the educational services and materials provided to schools;
- improvements in access and services for disabled people;
- the higher profile of the Assembly at major events across Wales.

There are also plans to improve access to the Assembly's broadcast output and to make better use of the opportunities for public access provided by Regional Committees.

I would be happy to provide more details if you wish.

### **Improving the Speed and Efficiency of the OSIRIS Network**

**Q8 Christine Gwyther:** What progress is being made to improve the speed and efficiency of the OSIRIS network in constituency offices? (OAQ11924) *Withdrawn.*

### **The Pierhead Exhibition**

**Q9 Owen John Thomas:** What plans are there to make the Pierhead exhibition more attractive, accessible and meaningful to the visiting public? (OAQ11925)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The Assembly at the Pierhead visitor and education centre opened fully to the public last month. Visitor numbers have averaged out at 1,000 per week. It is too early to make a formal evaluation of the success of the venture but the initial response of visitors to the centre and exhibition has been overwhelmingly positive.

Initially, the Pierhead team concentrated on getting the practicalities of running the centre right. The next stage will be to evaluate feedback from the leaders of group visits and from a sample of drop-in visitors. The feedback will inform changes to the exhibition, which are also expected to be initiated by changes within the Assembly, and by new types of exhibition material developed for Regional Committees and events such as the Eisteddfod.

### **'Green Housekeeping' in the Presiding Office**

**Q10 Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** What discussions has the House Committee had with the sustainable development unit regarding the need for 'green housekeeping' in the Presiding Office, as outlined in the sustainable development action plan? (OAQ11940)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No direct discussions have taken place.

### **Commitment to Sustainable Development**

**Q11 Phil Williams:** What steps have been taken to ensure the Presiding Office's procurement policy demonstrates a commitment to sustainable development? (OAQ11942)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The Presiding Office follows the general Assembly policy on procurement. The checklist included in the Assembly's procurement manual includes a check that the tender specification takes due account of the Assembly's environmental policies.