

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 15 February 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 Minister for Health and Social Services

Preventative Medicine

Q6 Peter Black: Does the NHS national plan make provisions for Wales to take forward preventative medicine? (OAQ9658)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): Yes. Action to prevent disease and ill health and to reduce inequalities in health are core components of the plan. The plan will strengthen further the role of the NHS in preventing ill health and in positive action to improve people's health and well-being.

The 'Health Economy' Model

Q7 David Lloyd: Would Jane Hutt make a brief statement on the concept of the 'health economy' model found in the document 'Access and Excellence: Acute Health Services in Wales'? (OAQ9664)

Jane Hutt: The concept of the 'health economy' recognises the natural relationships between hospital services in a region, reflecting existing clinical practices and known patient flows rather than current health authority boundaries or the notional catchment areas of major hospitals. 'Access and Excellence', the report of the Acute Services Development Group, proposed making the concept of health economies central in planning regional services. Benefits of this include ensuring a sufficiently wide population base to allow the provision of a comprehensive range of services. The NHS plan, 'Improving Health in Wales', reaffirmed that the National Assembly will build on the health economy concept and will use it to develop new planning processes to prepare detailed service and investment plans at a regional level.

Guidance on the Provision of Beta Interferon

Q8 Dafydd Wigley: Will Jane Hutt make a brief statement on the effect, in Wales, of the delay announced over the Christmas period by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, in issuing guidance on the provision of beta interferon? (OAQ9673)

Jane Hutt: All health authorities in Wales supply the drug beta-interferon in accordance with Standing Medical Advisory Committee guidelines for patients with the relapsing-remitting form of the illness. The supply of the drug under the NHS for other forms of multiple sclerosis remains a matter for local decision.

Repeat Prescriptions

Q9 Jocelyn Davies: Has Jane Hutt had discussions with the medical profession regarding the administration of repeat prescriptions? (OAQ9657)

Jane Hutt: The issue of repeat prescriptions is among those presently being considered by the Task and Finish group. The group's report is to be considered by the Health and Social Services Committee on 14 March. Following the Committee's consideration of the report, and its recommendations in respect of repeat prescriptions, I will consider what further action may be necessary.

Funding for Hospice Facilities

Q10 Delyth Evans: What is Jane Hutt doing to secure funding for hospice facilities in Wales? (OAQ9681)

Jane Hutt: The funding of palliative care services, including hospice facilities, has been the responsibility of the health authorities since 1995 and they must provide appropriate services based on the needs and priorities of their local area. Welsh Office guidance to the health authorities suggested that everyone in Wales should have access to good quality palliative care services and that health authorities should work with NHS trusts and the voluntary hospice movement to ensure that needs are met. Ultimately it is for the health authorities to determine the pattern of services, bearing in mind that care may be provided at home, in a hospital or a hospice.

Palliative care was one of the proposed initiatives put forward in a public consultation paper seeking views on how extra National Lottery funding should be spent by the new opportunities fund in Wales. The views received as a result of the consultation will be taken into account in deciding how this initiative should be designed and delivered.

Officials have been working with the Welsh Association of Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Units to produce a palliative care strategy for Wales and a Welsh Medical Committee review of pain services and palliative care services in Wales is also taking place. The review will produce a report on the current provision of services, review the standards that the NHS should be meeting and will produce a list of recommendations for developments in the service. I will outline the outcome of the review in Plenary in April when we will be discussing pain and palliative care.

Waiting List Reduction Targets

Q11 Nick Bourne: Can Jane Hutt report on her progress in meeting her waiting list reduction targets for Wales? (OAQ9649)

Jane Hutt: Targets were agreed with individual health authorities in May and they were each allocated a share of the £40 million for waiting times and winter pressures. Health authorities took responsibility for managing delivery in their area, co-ordinating the effort and using the resources appropriately.

Issues such as success and speed in recruiting staff, purchasing equipment and acquiring additional capacity have affected performance. Increases in emergency pressures also impact on levels of elective activity.

Meetings have been arranged and will be taking place shortly to discuss with health authorities progress in achieving the targets within the time agreed.

The NHS Plan for Wales

Q12 Christine Gwyther: How does the NHS plan for Wales strike a balance between promoting good health and preventing sickness? (OAQ9620) *Withdrawn.*

Research into Health and Social Care

Q13 Elin Jones: Will Jane Hutt make a brief statement on her priorities for research into health and social care? (OAQ9667) *Withdrawn.*

Abolishing Health Authorities in Wales

Q14 Peter Black: What is the timescale for the abolition of health authorities in Wales? (OAQ9645)

Jane Hutt: Health authorities in Wales will be abolished by April 2003 in line with the policy agenda for NHS Wales set out in 'Improving Health In Wales'.

Implementing Recommendation Number 61 of the Waterhouse Report

Q15 Gwenda Thomas: What monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that recommendation number 61 of the Waterhouse report is being implemented by local authorities? (OAQ9684)

Jane Hutt: Statutory monthly visits to children's homes can be undertaken by officers or elected members. Where local authorities decide that elected members should make such visits, it is a matter for them to ensure that elected members are willing and receive appropriate guidance on the purpose of the visits. From April, the National Assembly will require local authorities to indicate, as a Children First performance indicator, that their arrangements for statutory visits to looked-after children in residential care and foster care and for monthly visits to children's homes fully comply with regulations.

Waiting Lists in North Wales

Q16 Peter Rogers: Do current forecasts indicate whether or not waiting lists in north Wales will be cut in line with Jane Hutt's commitment to achieve a 65,000 national cut by March 2001? (OAQ9731)

Jane Hutt: In May I allocated an additional £40 million for the NHS to tackle waiting lists and emergency pressures with £35 million available recurrently from 2001-02. Targets were agreed with the North Wales Health Authority and they have agreed individual targets with their provider trusts. Together they are managing activity on a monthly basis.

The Assembly is closely monitoring progress against the targets. A meeting will take place shortly to discuss progress.

Improving Patient Care in Monmouthshire

Q17 David Davies: What steps is Jane Hutt taking to improve patient care in Monmouthshire? (OAQ9730)

Jane Hutt: Patient care in Monmouthshire, as in the rest of Wales, will benefit greatly from the many detailed proposals in the recently-launched NHS plan, 'Improving the Health of Wales' and from the increased resources the National Assembly has made available for health care.

Examples of activities specific to Monmouthshire or Gwent are:

- Assembly officials are working with Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust to develop public-private partnership proposals for the Monnow Court project. This innovative project would provide a modern, purpose-built facility in Monmouth offering a range of integrated services across the health and social care boundary.
- The Commission for Health Improvement is carrying out a clinical governance review of Gwent Health Authority, which will look at arrangements for clinical governance in the Health Authority, local health groups and General Practices in the Authority's area, which includes Monmouthshire. The Commission's report, which is due to be published in April, will make recommendations which the Health Authority will use to produce a plan for improving services.

‘Social Services in Wales 1999-2000: The Report of the Chief Inspector’

Q18 Jocelyn Davies: Will Jane Hutt make a brief statement on ‘Social Services in Wales 1999-2000: The Report of the Chief Inspector’? (OAQ9659) *Withdrawn.*

The Future of Dyfed Powys Health Authority

Q19 Glyn Davies: Will Jane Hutt make a statement about the future of Dyfed Powys Health Authority? (OAQ9685)

Jane Hutt: ‘Improving Health in Wales’ sets out the plan for the future development of NHS Wales. As part of this I intend to strengthen the roles of local health groups and the National Assembly. This will remove the need for health authorities in Wales. Dyfed Powys Health Authority and the other four health authorities in Wales will therefore be abolished by April 2003. Stakeholders will be consulted on the details of implementing this.

Palliative Care in the NHS in Wales

Q20 Janice Gregory: Will Jane Hutt make a brief statement on the current situation of palliative care in the NHS in Wales? (OAQ9646) *Withdrawn.*

Adult Medical Emergency Admissions

Q21 William Graham: Will Jane Hutt make a statement concerning the demand for adult medical emergency admissions that have pushed bed occupancy levels beyond 100 per cent in some hospitals? (OAQ9727)

Jane Hutt: I am aware of the pressures that have occurred in many hospitals over the last couple of months, meaning that since early December, on average, 5,000 adults are admitted to a hospital bed each week.

For the first time, daily and weekly reporting has been in place since early December, enabling the NHS to see where the pressures are in the service, so that immediate action can be taken. Based on our experience last year, I implemented several initiatives to provide a sustainable increase in capacity, and to help the NHS prepare for this winter. The latest bed survey showed that an additional 139 emergency admission beds and 29 critical care beds would be available across Wales by 31 January 2001. Other initiatives included:

- The appointment of an extra 23 consultants with more being recruited.
- funding for 190 extra training places for nurses, midwives and health visitors; this increase will continue year on year so that by 2004, 760 nurses will be trained;
- funded places in colleges for up to 160 nurses returning to work;
- detailed winter planning guidance issued in August to all organisations and partners based on the work of the emergency pressures taskforce;
- a ‘Keep Well this Winter’ campaign, aimed at those aged over 65.

Waiting List Targets

Q22 Alun Cairns: Will Jane Hutt make a statement on how she is progressing towards her waiting list targets? (OAQ9687)

Jane Hutt: Targets were agreed with individual health authorities in May and they were each allocated a share of the £40 million for waiting times and winter pressures. Health authorities took responsibility for managing delivery in their area, co-ordinating the effort and using the resources appropriately.

Issues such as success and speed in recruiting staff, purchasing equipment and acquiring additional capacity have affected performance. Increases in emergency pressures also impact on levels of elective activity.

Meetings have been arranged and will take place shortly to discuss with health authorities progress in achieving the targets within the time agreed.

Developing the Provision of Welsh Language Services in the NHS

Q23 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: How does Jane Hutt intend to develop the provision of services in the Welsh language in the NHS? (OAQ9679) *Withdrawn.*

Respite and Residential Care for Young Disabled People

Q24 Richard Edwards: Will Jane Hutt make a statement on the provision of respite and residential care for young disabled people in Wales? (OAQ9622)

Developing a National Health Policy for Wales

Q25 Janet Ryder: How are regional disparities factored into the development of a national health policy for Wales? (OAQ9671) *Withdrawn.*

The Development of Mental Health Services in Cardiff

Q26 Pauline Jarman: Will Jane Hutt make a brief statement on the development of mental health services in Cardiff? (OAQ9678) *Withdrawn.*

The Proposed UK Health Professions Council

Q27 Helen Mary Jones: Has Jane Hutt held any discussions regarding the proposed UK health professions council with Alan Milburn, the UK Secretary of State for Health? (OAQ9669) *Withdrawn.*

Acute Neurological Trauma

Q28 Val Feld: Will Jane Hutt make a statement about current provision for the rehabilitation of people who have suffered acute neurological trauma? (OAQ9690) *Withdrawn.*

Free Dental Check-ups

Q29 Mick Bates: What steps has Jane Hutt taken to bring forward secondary legislation to extend free dental check-ups as promised in the partnership agreement? (OAQ9688)

Jane Hutt: The necessary draft Order is being prepared and is due to be put to the Assembly in Plenary on 29 March 2001.

Nifer y Doctoriaid sydd yn cael eu Hyfforddi yng Nghymru ar Hyn o Bryd

C30 Owen John Thomas: Faint o ddoctoriaid sydd yn cael eu hyfforddi yng Nghymru ar hyn o bryd i gymryd lle meddygon teulu fydd yn cyrraedd oedran ymddeol yn ystod y pum mlynedd nesaf? (OAQ9650) [W]

Jane Hutt: Rydym wedi cynyddu'r nifer ar y Cynllun Hyfforddiant Galwedigaethol ar gyfer Meddygon Teulu (GPTVS) o 97 yn 1999 i 110 yn 2000, ac yr ydym yn cynllunio ar gyfer cynnydd pellach o naw y flwyddyn dros y tair blynedd nesaf, sydd yn cyfateb i gynnydd o 27 erbyn 2003. Yr ydym hefyd yn

cyflwyno nifer o fesurau i wella recriwtio a chadw. Mae'r rhain yn cynnwys y cynllun cadw meddygon Teulu a hyblygrwydd ariannu o fewn GPVTS.

O ganlyniad i'r ddau gynllun hwn, yr ydym wedi ymrwymo £2.074 miliwn yn ychwanegol yn 2001-02 a £1.673 miliwn yn 2002-03 i gefnogi'r datblygiadau hyn.

Bydd y penderfyniadau ar anghenion hyfforddiant yn y dyfodol yn dibynnu ar ganlyniad yr adolygiad o'r broses bresennol o gynllunio'r gweithlu yng Nghymru.

The Number of Doctors Currently Being Trained in Wales

Q30 Owen John Thomas: How many doctors are currently being trained in Wales to replace GPs who are due to reach retirement age during the next five years? (OAQ9650) [W]

Jane Hutt: We have increased the General Practice Vocational Training Scheme numbers from 97 in 1999 to 110 in 2000 and we are planning extra growth by nine per year over the next three years, which means a further increase of 27 by 2003. We are also introducing several measures to improve recruitment and retention. These include the GP retainers scheme and funding flexibility within GPVTS.

As a result of both these exercises, we have committed an extra £2.074 million in 2001-02 and £1.673 million in 2002-03 to support these developments.

Decisions on future training needs will be based on the outcome of the review of the current workforce planning process in Wales.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Reviewing Further Education in Wales

Q2 Christine Gwyther: Does the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning have any plans to review further education in Wales? (OAQ9599)

Transferred for written reply.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): Not at present. The shape of post-16 education and training in Wales is currently in a state of transition as we implement the provisions in the Learning and Skills Act 2000, which includes the setting up of the new National Council for Education and Training for Wales.

There will inevitably be changes over the coming year or two. The new council and all providers of post-16 education and training, including the further education sector, will need to review processes, systems and procedures to ensure that their clients—individuals, employers and the community—have easy access to learning of the right quality and quantity, at the right place and time, and with the appropriate provider. It would be premature to review further education in Wales until these changes have been introduced.

Questions 3 to 6 were answered in Plenary.

Financial Support for Higher Education Institutions (Community Learners)

Q7 Geraint Davies: What action will Jane Davidson take to ensure adequate financial support is offered to higher education institutions which provide outreach services to community learners? (OAQ9711)

Jane Davidson: My recent letter of guidance to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales states that the council should provide development funds to link higher education institutions with schools,

colleges and community groups to encourage progression through higher education and to target disadvantaged groups and mature students. HEFCW has also been asked to keep under review, and if necessary develop, its funding formula to recognise success in the recruitment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds or facing particular challenges.

From 2000-01, HEFCW is drawing together previous funding initiatives for widening access to provide a £1.5 million a year widening access fund. HEFCW's aim is for institutions to develop a strategic and planned approach to widening access to higher education in the context of their own missions, experience and knowledge of the needs of their own communities. Funding will be released on the receipt by HEFCW of acceptable widening access strategies. The first set of strategies will be received at the end of this month. Several higher education institutions have substantial community-based programmes and HEFCW expects these to figure strongly in their strategies and for other institutions to take the opportunity to develop such programmes.

Institutions also receive funding through HEFCW's mainstream teaching funding allocations for students studying for credits, which can contribute to a higher education qualification.

Promoting Lifelong Learning in the Workplace (Trade Unions' Role)

Q8 Brian Gibbons: Will Jane Davidson set out the role for trade unions in promoting lifelong learning in the workplace? (OAQ9630)

Jane Davidson: Trade unions are making an increasingly valuable contribution to progressing the lifelong learning agenda through workplace education and training. I support the growing partnership between employers, employees and their unions to give people the skills and knowledge they need to advance their careers.

The introduction of the Wales union learning fund in 1999 has enabled the Assembly to strengthen this partnership. We have supported a wide range of projects by unions including projects that improve equal opportunities training and others that support the role of union learning representatives.

Combating Disaffection among School Leavers

Q9 Helen Mary Jones: How is Jane Davidson ensuring that a sustainable strategy to combat disaffection among school leavers in Wales is in place? (OAQ9718)

Jane Davidson: The Assembly's youth access initiative, which seeks to address the problems of disaffected 14 to 17 year olds, has been operating for three years and from April 2001 will be brought within the children and youth partnership fund. Local authorities are responsible for preparing and implementing plans to use youth access initiative funding and they have been asked to submit revised strategies by 15 February.

In addition, measures have been included in both the Objective 1 and the Objective 3 structural fund programmes to enable support and assistance to be given to disaffected young people and bids for assistance under both programmes have already been approved.

More generally, the enhancement of support services for all young people in Wales envisaged in the 'Extending Entitlement' report will assist in addressing the particular problems of the disaffected. Services which are simply targeted at particular vulnerable groups run the risk of stigmatising the young people concerned. A robust network of services for young people can reduce this by taking advantage of opportunities to connect disaffected young people with mainstream activities.

Teaching Foreign Languages

Q10 William Graham: Will Jane Davidson make a statement on the teaching of modern foreign languages in Wales? (OAQ9698)

Jane Davidson: The National Assembly draft national languages strategy was launched for consultation by the First Minister in Cardiff in December and the subject of a further conference in Llandudno last month, at which I gave the key note speech. Consultation closes on 16 March.

Higher Education Budget 2001-04

Q11 Elin Jones: What discussions has Jane Davidson had with representatives from higher education institutions in Wales regarding the proposed higher education budget for 2001-04? (OAQ9721)

Jane Davidson: I have not had any formal discussions with representatives from individual higher education institutions in Wales on the higher education budgets for 2001-04. However, I have met with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales to discuss the budgets.

I have raised with the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities the concerns expressed by the Welsh higher education sector through HEFCW about the indicative budgets for 2002-03 and 2003-04. Mrs Hart has already stated that she will take them into account in next year's budget round.

Furthering Teachers' Professional Development

Q12 Owen John Thomas: How is Jane Davidson monitoring the overall process and mechanisms that are in place to further the professional development of teachers in Wales? (OAQ9631)

Jane Davidson: Much continuing professional development of teachers in Wales is supported through the grants for education support and training. Each year, the local education authorities submit proposals to the National Assembly, setting out how they will support professional development within the activity areas of the GEST programme. As part of their submission, the LEAs are required to set out their arrangements for monitoring spending within the activity areas and to demonstrate how the GEST objectives will be achieved. Estyn advises the Assembly on the quality of the LEAs proposals. My officials monitor both the LEA performance against targets and whether funding was used in line with National Assembly requirements.

As part of its section 10 inspection programme, Estyn also requires inspectors to report on the outcomes of in-service training within individual schools. From time to time, Estyn also makes focused visits to training events and to schools to evaluate the outcomes of continuing professional development.

Training Incentives Programme

Q13 Kirsty Williams: Will Jane Davidson make a statement on the status of the training incentives programmes for teachers as it is being administered here in Wales? (OAQ9641)

Jane Davidson: Incentive grants for initial teacher training in Wales are made by the Assembly under the Teacher Training Incentive (Wales) Regulations 2000. The regulations also provide for grants to be paid to encourage schools to take on and train graduate teachers.

Nurturing Entrepreneurship (Higher Education Institutions)

Q14 Brian Hancock: What measures will Jane Davidson introduce to encourage higher education institutions to nurture entrepreneurship within Wales? (OAQ9713)

Jane Davidson: A range of practical programmes and activities to promote entrepreneurship within higher education institutions have already been identified within the entrepreneurship implementation plan which was recently endorsed by the Assembly.

One of the early actions of the implementation panel, which is being reconstituted from the entrepreneurship action plan's steering group, will be to earmark those programmes and activities which have the most potential in terms of relevance and impact and to ensure that these are taken forward, hopefully, without delay.

Additionally the Assembly's knowledge exploitation fund (KEF) is aimed at supporting a broad spectrum of wealth creating activities not already covered or to provide a step change boost to some existing activities, and to embed a culture of entrepreneurship across post-16 education and training. It encompasses both higher and further education in one programme and encourages collaboration between the two sectors. We are making a total of £34 million over the period 2000-2004 available under this fund. The KEF is also an important vehicle for levering in European funds for Objective 1 and 3 areas.

Under the KEF programme, every higher and further education institution in Wales will have its own 'entrepreneurship champion'—a high ranking member of staff whose salary is supported by the fund and whose sole brief is to promote enterprise.

Improving the Physical Infrastructure of Welsh Schools (ICT)

Q15 Mick Bates: Will Jane Davidson make a statement on the need to improve the physical infrastructure of Welsh schools to accommodate information technology communications? (OAQ9699)

Jane Davidson: I recently announced details of the ICT for learning strategy which will provide £16 million to extend access to ICT facilities for schools and learners across Wales. As part of this strategy, £10 million will be available for computers and networking facilities in schools and additional ICT equipment for primary schools. We are inviting LEAs and their local partners to submit proposals for the development of school learning centres in their areas. Funding of £0.5 million will also be available for ICT equipment for pupils with special educational needs. In addition, the provision and installation of cabling for ICT as part of an improvement renovation or replacement building project is eligible for support under the New Deal: Additional Capital Funding for Schools Programme.

Meetings with Teaching Unions 2001

Q16 Janice Gregory: What plans does Jane Davidson have for meetings with the teaching unions in 2001? (OAQ9609) *Withdrawn.*

Rural Schools Policy for Wales

Q17 Richard Edwards: Can Jane Davidson give a progress report on the development of a rural schools policy for Wales? (OAQ9600) *Withdrawn.*

Concordat between the Assembly and DfEE

Q18 Nick Bourne: When will a concordat be signed between the Assembly and the Department for Education and Employment? (OAQ9602)

Jane Davidson: Work on the concordat is very near to completion. I anticipate that it will be signed shortly.

Retraining Opportunities for the Newly Unemployed

Q19 Helen Mary Jones: What measures are in place to ensure adequate retraining opportunities for the newly unemployed in Wales? (OAQ9720)

Jane Davidson: The Assembly places great emphasis on helping unemployed people access training opportunities. The Employment Service's New Deal for Young People and the Assembly's work-based learning for adults offer a range of individually tailored guidance, structured work experience and training to help people enhance their skills and secure sustainable employment. Normally aimed at long-term unemployed people, early entry to these programmes is available to certain groups, including those affected by significant redundancies. In addition, modern apprenticeships and national traineeships are available for young people and the new modern skills diploma for adults will become available from 1 April 2001 for those aged over 25.

Staff Recruitment and Retention (Further and Higher Education)

Q20 Pauline Jarman: Will Jane Davidson make a statement on recruitment and retention of staff in further and higher education in Wales? (OAQ9706)

Jane Davidson: The initial findings of a recent survey by the further education national training organisation indicated difficulties in recruiting further education lecturers for IT, engineering, performing arts, health and social care, mathematics and accounts courses in Wales. Fewer subject areas were identified in Wales than in England or Northern Ireland.

Further and higher education institutions are independent autonomous bodies responsible for their own management, including the pay and conditions of employment of staff. For the FE sector, CETW's remit letter for 2001-02 makes clear that I expect institutions in the sector to follow public sector policy by taking account of fairness and the need to recruit and retain staff. My remit letter to HEFCW places similar expectations on higher education institutions.

I have just announced that recruitment incentive grants will be extended to cover FE teacher trainee students from September 2001. The impact of this pilot scheme will be reviewed by the Assembly in due course.

Financial Packages for Education and Training

Q21 Cynog Dafis: Has Jane Davidson received any guidance from the Department for Education and Employment regarding future announcements of financial packages for education and training? (OAQ9715)

Jane Davidson: Where the Department for Education and Employment is responsible for policies which apply in Wales but funding in Wales is the responsibility of the Assembly—for example teachers' pay and conditions—the Assembly is consulted on those policies. Where DfEE has both policy and funding responsibility for programmes, which cover England and Wales, but the Assembly has a policy or other interest there is close liaison. In areas where DfEE and the National Assembly have parallel but entirely separate responsibilities for England and Wales respectively, DfEE decisions have no read across to Wales.

Agriculture-related Courses (Number of Students)

Q22 Peter Rogers: Will Jane Davidson make a statement on the numbers of students engaged in agriculture-related courses in Wales? (OAQ9636) [R]

Jane Davidson: Figures provided by the Welsh funding councils in their publication 'Further and Higher Education Statistics in Wales: 1998/99' show that a total of 10,330 students were engaged in agriculture

or related courses in academic year 1998-99, the latest date for which information is available. Some 8,896 students were studying in further education institutions and 1,434 in higher education. There were 3,673 students on full-time or sandwich courses and 6,657 following part-time courses or other modes of attendance. There were broadly similar numbers of male and female students with 5,418 males and 4,912 females.

Improving Discipline Levels

Q23 David Davies: What measures is Jane Davidson taking to improve discipline levels in Welsh schools? (OAQ9695)

Jane Davidson: All maintained schools must have a clear behaviour policy which sets out the boundaries of what is acceptable, the hierarchy of sanctions, the arrangements for their consistent and fair application and a linked system of rewards for good behaviour.

These requirements are set out in National Assembly Circular 3/99, 'Pupil Support and Social Inclusion', along with advice on a range of school-based actions to address pupil disaffection and challenge behavioural difficulties. This includes, for example, setting up pastoral support programmes in schools, which are a school-based intervention to help individual pupils to better manage their behaviour.

In addition, LEAs are required to have behaviour support plans in place, which should give details of training, consultation, guidance and other services available to schools to help them effectively manage pupil behaviour. Welsh Office Circular 19/98 provides guidance on drawing up these plans. Although there is no requirement for behaviour support plans to be approved by the Assembly, we have recently provided LEAs with comments on their initial plans, and they are due to publish revised plans by 1 April 2001.

Funding is available to LEAs under the grants for education support and training programme for tackling issues relating to school attendance and behaviour. In putting forward bids for this area, LEAs are required to set out arrangements for multi-agency working for early intervention and preventative work to reduce pupil disaffection. Three million was allocated to this area in 2000-01 and £9.86 million has been allocated to the area of tackling social disadvantage under GEST for 2001-02. It will be for LEAs to decide how much of this is spent on school attendance and behaviour within their local priorities.

Funding for Wales (DFEE Initiatives)

Q24 Jocelyn Davies: What action has Jane Davidson taken to ensure that Wales receives its fair share of funding announced in Department for Education and Employment initiatives in the future? (OAQ9709)

Jane Davidson: The National Assembly for Wales receives its funding in accordance with the terms set out in the 'Statement of Funding Policy'. We ensure that these rules are complied with.

Higher Education Budget 2001-04 (Discussion with Trade Unions)

Q25 Jocelyn Davies: Has Jane Davidson met with trade union representatives to discuss the provisional higher education budget between 2001-04? (OAQ9710)

Jane Davidson: I met with higher education union representatives on 5 December 2000 to discuss higher education funding in Wales. I have also met with the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education separately on two other occasions—most recently on 6 February—at which the higher education budgets were discussed.

Promoting Freedom of Information in Education

Q26 Alun Cairns: What steps are being introduced to promote freedom of information in education? (OAQ9701)

Jane Davidson: A number of steps are already in place to promote freedom of, and access to, information in education. The National Assembly makes available annually to schools and members of the public a series of booklets and digests which sets out a range of performance and background information for each secondary school in Wales. Members of the public may obtain copies of these documents free of charge from their local schools, libraries, the National Assembly and the internet.

Both the Further and Higher Education Funding Councils for Wales follow the Assembly's code of practice on public access to information. They publish annual reports and accounts, newsletters after each council meeting, which include extensive coverage of the meeting and other issues, and hold annual public meetings. The councils also publish an annual compilation of statistics on further and higher education in Wales.

Independent inspection reports and quality assessment reports on further and higher education provision are published. Most institutions also make available a range of information about courses on offer and the services available to students.

The National Council for Education and Training for Wales (ELWa) will be required to be open and accountable in the conduct of its business. Copies of all the council's published documents will be made available to the Assembly's Libraries. The council will also become subject to the prospective requirements of the freedom of information legislation as and when it applies to the Assembly and its sponsored bodies.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales publishes an annual report. Estyn also routinely publishes school inspection reports and a range of survey reports on standards and quality in aspects of education and training.

ACCAC follows the Assembly's code of practice on public access to information. It also publishes annual reports and accounts, newsletters, and a wide range of publications on matters within its remit.

The Assembly regularly undertakes open consultation on a range of educational policies and initiatives. All local authorities are required to publish education strategic plans, approved by the Assembly, setting out their priorities for action in raising educational standards. The plans cover a three-year period (1999-2002) and are updated annually via supplementary plans. Both the education strategic plans and the supplementary plans are publicly available from local authorities.

As the First Minister indicated on 21 March 2000, the Assembly is committed to maximising openness. Making information available ensures that government is carried out as a partnership between the Government and the governed.

Reducing Primary School Class Sizes

Q27 Kirsty Williams: What progress is being made on reducing primary school class sizes in Wales? (OAQ9640)

Jane Davidson: Good progress is being made. Thirty per cent of infant pupils were in classes of over 30 in January 1998. At September 2000, just 4,600 pupils (4.5 per cent) were in classes of over 30. The number is expected to fall further when Year 2 classes become subject to the statutory 30-pupil limit in September 2001.

At September 2000, there were just over 42,300 pupils (29 per cent) in junior classes of over 30 compared with 45,800 pupils (31 per cent) in September 1999.

The average size of primary classes was 25.1 at September 2000 compared with 25.4 at September 1999 and 27.1 at January 1998.

Tackling Homophobic Bullying in Schools

Q28 Christine Chapman: Does the Assembly have a strategy to tackle homophobic bullying in schools? (OAQ9629)

Jane Davidson: The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 places a legal obligation on headteachers to prevent all forms of bullying in their schools. National Assembly Circular 3/99, 'Pupil Support and Social Inclusion', draws together a range of practical actions that schools, governing bodies and local education authorities might adopt to sustain good behaviour and discipline in schools, including anti-bullying strategies. This specifically mentions racial and sexual harassment although homophobic bullying is not mentioned explicitly. Effective strategies against bullying should form a central part of a school's behaviour policy and be put into effect by everyone in school, including the pupils.

A study by the Institute of Education in 1997 indicated that many teachers were concerned about the legal status of any action they might take against homophobic bullying. They saw section 2A of the Local Government Act 1986 (often referred to as 'Section 28') as a constraint. The study, however, confirmed that schools have an awareness of the difficulties facing young lesbians and gay men and recognise that it is not acceptable for schools to ignore homophobic bullying or deny its existence in the same way that any form of bullying cannot be tolerated.

The Government continues to accept that 'Section 28' can be confusing, creates a climate that may encourage discrimination and discourages schools from developing sensible policies to tackle homophobic bullying. The House of Lords, however, takes a different view on the repeal of 'Section 28' and the Government has reluctantly decided not to pursue this issue in the current Parliamentary session.

We will nevertheless be consulting shortly on revised guidance to address specific issues relating to the teaching of sex education in schools. Section 403 of the Education Act 1996, as amended by section 148 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, requires the National Assembly to issue such guidance and this will eventually replace that provided in Welsh Office Circular 45/94 'Sex Education in Schools'. The guidance will cover sexual orientation and I have asked that the consultation document include specific reference to schools dealing with homophobic bullying.

In the light of responses to the consultation exercise, I will ask officials to consider what further advice might be issued to schools to supplement that on bullying already set out in National Assembly Circular 3/99. This would take account also of the work being undertaken by the Department for Education and Employment to update the 1994 information pack, 'Don't Suffer in Silence: An Anti-bullying Pack for Schools' that is available to schools across England and Wales.

Small Schools Policy

Q29 Nick Bourne: What developments are being made in the formation of a small schools policy for Wales? (OAQ9603)

Jane Davidson: I refer to my answer to your previous question on this issue (WAQ8650). There is nothing further to add at this stage.

Audit of Sports Facilities (Secondary Schools)

Q30 Brian Gibbons: Has any audit been undertaken of sports facilities in Welsh secondary schools? (OAQ9632)

Jane Davidson: This information is not held centrally. The Sports Council for Wales conducts a survey every two years, in which it sends questionnaires to heads of physical education in all secondary schools in Wales. Results from the most recent survey, carried out last November, are being collated and should be available in May. This will contain information on the availability of sports facilities, both on and off-site. The physical education/school sport taskforce has recommended that a significant amount of additional lottery funding—to be distributed by the new opportunities fund—should be allocated for the development of sports facilities in schools. I hope to make an announcement on this shortly.

Questions to the House Committee

Cigarette Odour

Q6 Christine Gwyther: What plans are there to ensure that cigarette odour does not escape into non-smoking areas? (OAQ9615)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Marek): The smoking room is equipped with a smoke extraction system and carbon filters to reduce the emission and odour of smoke both within the smoking room and into the surrounding non-smoking areas. Entry to the room is also by a double door. Checks will be made to ensure the continuing proper functioning of the extraction system.