

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 22 March 2001

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

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

Contents

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

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Respite and Residential Care for Disabled People

Q6 Richard Edwards: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of respite and residential care for young disabled people in Wales? (OAQ10442)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): The responsibility for the provision of respite and residential care for young disabled people lies with local authorities. The Assembly has issued guidance to local authorities on the provision, planning and performance review of existing services, including services for young disabled people in Wales.

The Assembly's Children First programme aims to increase the number of disabled children in receipt of family support services and the number of hours of service provided, to enable disabled children and their families to lead as ordinary a life as possible. Also, the Assembly has established a working group to develop a strategic framework for the placement of looked-after children in Wales. Among other things, the group will consider the scope for closer co-operation between authorities in providing for children with specialised care needs.

Triniaeth ar Glefydau'r Galon

C7 Owen John Thomas: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar y rhestrau aros presennol yng Nghymru am driniaeth ar glefydau'r galon? (OAQ10457) [W]

Jane Hutt: Mae mynd i'r afael ag afiechyd coronol y galon a gostwng y marwolaethau, yr afiechyd a'r boen meddwl sydd yn gysylltiedig â'r clefyd hwn yn parhau yn un o brif flaenoriaethau'r Cynulliad ar gyfer yr NHS yng Nghymru.

Mae'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol yn monitro'r rhestrau aros ar gyfer llawdriniaethau ar y galon ac ar gyfer gwasanaethau cardioleg. Ar ddiwedd mis Ionawr 2001, yr oedd 885 o bobl ar restr aros cleifion mewnol/achosion dydd ar gyfer llawdriniaethau ar y galon, a 1376 ar y rhestr aros am wasanaethau cardioleg. Mae'r rhestr aros am lawdriniaethau ar y galon wedi dechrau gostwng, ac erbyn hyn mae'r cynnydd yn y rhestr gardioleg wedi sefydlogi.

Yn 2000-01, yn ogystal â'r cynnydd mawr yn y dyraniad ariannol sylfaenol i awdurdodau iechyd, darperais £1.5 miliwn i leddfu'r pwysau gwaethaf sydd ar wasanaethau'r galon, yn ogystal â £25 miliwn tuag at gwrdd â blaenoriaethau'r Cynulliad. O'r cyfanswm hwn, mae awdurdodau iechyd yn gwario £3.3 miliwn eleni ar afiechyd coronol y galon, a bydd hyn yn codi i £6 miliwn mewn blynyddoedd sydd i ddod. Bydd hyn yn eu helpu i gwrdd â'r targed a bennwyd yn y ddogfen 'Gwella Iechyd yng Nghymru', na ddylai unrhyw un sydd arno angen llawdriniaeth gyffredin ar y galon orfod aros mwy na 12 mis am ei driniaeth.

Cwblhawyd yr ymgynghoriad ar gynllun gweithredu fframwaith y gwasanaeth cenedlaethol ar gyfer clefyd y galon yng Nghymru, a bydd y cynllun yn cael ei lansio yn y dyfodol agos. Bydd hyn yn pennu'r amserau hiraf y dylid aros am driniaeth o ran y clefyd hwn.

The Treatment of Heart Disease

Q7 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the present waiting lists in Wales for the treatment of heart disease? (OAQ10457) [W]

Jane Hutt: Tackling coronary heart disease and reducing mortality, disease and distress associated with this condition remains one of the Assembly's top priorities for the NHS in Wales.

The National Assembly monitors waiting lists for cardiac surgery and cardiology. At the end of January 2001, there were 885 people on the inpatient/day case waiting list for cardiac surgery and 1376 on the cardiology waiting list. The cardiac surgery list has begun to fall and a rise in the cardiology lists has now stabilised.

In 2000-01, in addition to the large increase in the basic financial allocation to health authorities, I made available £1.5 million to ease severest pressure on cardiac services, as well as £25 million towards meeting Assembly priorities. Of this, health authorities are spending £3.3 million this year on coronary heart disease, and this will rise to over £6 million in future years. This will assist in meeting the target set in 'Improving Health in Wales', that no one needing routine cardiac surgery should wait more than 12 months for the treatment.

Consultation on the coronary heart disease national service framework implementation plan for Wales has been completed and the plan will be launched in the near future. This will set additional maximum waiting times for this condition.

Welsh Hospital Trusts

Q8 David Davies: Will Welsh hospital trusts enjoy the same extra cash as their English counterparts as a result of the 2001 budget? (OAQ10494)

Jane Hutt: Edwina Hart has made clear that the allocation of the additional £100 million over three years for the Assembly will be considered in the budget planning round. This will allow us to examine all the options rather than rushing to make decisions now.

Palliative Care in the NHS

Q9 Janice Gregory: Will the Minister make a brief statement on the current situation regarding palliative care in the NHS in Wales? (OAQ10443)

Jane Hutt: You will be aware from my meeting with you and Val Feld on 14 February that a Welsh Medical Committee review of pain services and palliative care services in Wales is currently taking place. The review will produce a report on the current provision of services, review the standards that the NHS should be meeting and produce a list of recommendations for developments in the service. I will be outlining the outcome of the review in a Plenary debate on pain and palliative care in April this year.

Officials have also been working with the Welsh Association of Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Units to produce a palliative care strategy for Wales. I hope to receive a first draft of this within the next month.

The Cancer Services Co-ordinating Group

Q10 Lynne Neagle: Will the Minister make a statement on the all-Wales minimum standards issued by the cancer services co-ordinating group? (OAQ10498)

Jane Hutt: The cancer services co-ordinating group was formed in 1997 to take forward the work of the Cameron report in developing cancer services in Wales. The group has previously published minimum standards of care for all major cancers, and for specialist palliative care. These standards were revised last autumn and re-issued to the NHS in Wales.

Ensuring that the NHS in Wales provides at least the minimum standard of care for patients with cancer, as set out in these, is one of the Assembly's top priorities and 'Improving Health in Wales', the Assembly's plan for the NHS in Wales, reaffirms our commitment to achieving these standards.

Current Hospital Waiting Lists

Q11 Richard Edwards: Can the Minister make a statement on current hospital waiting lists in Wales? (OAQ10460) *Withdrawn.*

The Latest Waiting List Figures

Q12 Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the latest waiting list figures? (OAQ10496) *Withdrawn.*

Administering Medication to Children

Q13 Gwenda Thomas: What steps can the Minister take to ensure that medication is administered to those children who need it, during school hours, in strict accordance with their individual care plan? (OAQ10531)

Jane Hutt: Local education authorities are responsible for devising, in partnership with their schools, a policy for supporting pupils with individual medical needs. This policy should include the administration of prescription medicines during school hours. However, there is no legal duty requiring schools to administer medication, it is a voluntary role. Welsh Office Circular 34/97, Welsh Health Circular 97/31 and the accompanying good practice guide 'Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs', which deal with the matter were issued to all LEAs, schools, health authorities and trusts, teachers' unions and other interested organisations.

Renal Care in North Wales

Q14 Alun Pugh: Will the Minister make a statement on renal care in north Wales? (OAQ10497) *Withdrawn.*

Acute Neurological Trauma (Rehabilitation)

Q15 Val Feld: Will the Minister make a statement on the current provision in south Wales for the rehabilitation of people who have suffered acute neurological trauma? (OAQ10461) *Withdrawn.*

Recruiting Nurses in Wales

Q16 David Davies: What additional funding is to be made available for the recruitment of nurses in Wales? (OAQ10493)

Jane Hutt: A sum of £150,000 will be made available in 2001-02 for funding return to practice courses for nurses whose practice has lapsed and who need retraining. In addition, £14,577 is being made

available to train 190 extra nurses per year in Wales for the next four years. These nurses will then be available to be recruited by the NHS in Wales.

No doubt NHS trusts will spend some of the additional moneys provided on recruiting more nurses, however that information is not available at this time.

The Inequalities in Health Fund

Q17 Huw Lewis: Will the Minister make a statement on the inequalities in health fund? (OAQ10506)

Jane Hutt: The inequalities in health fund will, from April this year, support new action that addresses inequalities in health and the factors that contribute to it, including inequities in access to health services. Full details of the fund are set out in Welsh Health Circular (2001) 006, which has been distributed to organisations in the NHS, local government and the voluntary sector.

Preventing Attacks on NHS Staff

Q18 Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on measures being taken to prevent physical attacks on NHS staff? (OAQ10504)

Jane Hutt: The recently launched NHS plan 'Improving Health in Wales' stresses that better training must be in place to deal with incidents and that tougher action must be taken against those who assault or threaten staff. Discussions will take place within NHS Wales on how violence and threats will be reduced year on year and we are working closely with the Health and Safety Executive on introducing challenging targets for reducing incidents. We are also ensuring that NHS Wales's equality unit is enhanced so that it is able to provide an independent advice service for staff who have been subjected to violence or threats in the workplace.

Developing New Community Hospitals

Q19 Peter Law: What plans does the Minister have to develop new community hospitals throughout Wales? (OAQ10445)

Jane Hutt: At present, the development of community hospitals is the responsibility of the health authorities. They must assess the needs of the local area and, working with NHS trusts, local health groups, the voluntary sector and others, plan and prioritise their health services through their health improvement programmes to meet that need within the resources available.

Current policy on the use of community hospitals is set out in the document 'Community Hospitals in Wales: the Future'. We recognise the need for smaller, local hospitals to provide a range of services based on local need. Each community hospital should develop a clear role and purpose, with the facilities and skill of the staff reflecting the role and purpose of each hospital. Ultimately, however, the development of community hospitals and their role must be locally agreed.

Removing Asbestos from Hospitals

Q20 Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the removal of asbestos from Welsh hospitals? (OAQ10495) *Withdrawn.*

Assessing the BMA Publication and Its Implications for Wales

Q21 Alun Pugh: Has the Minister made any assessment of the British Medical Association publication, 'Keep Smiling: No One's Going To Die', and its implications for the people of Wales? (OAQ10501) *Withdrawn.*

Recently Published Hospital Waiting Lists

Q22 Delyth Evans: Could the Minister make a brief statement on recently published hospital waiting lists? (OAQ10492)

Jane Hutt: Hospital waiting list figures for January 2001 were published on Wednesday 28 February. They showed the largest percentage decrease in the inpatient/day case list since March 1999 and the outpatient list since January 1999.

Across Wales, the inpatient/day case list fell by 2,086 (-2.7 per cent) with reductions in all five health authorities. There was also a fall of 5.4 per cent in those waiting over 12 months for treatment and a fall of 2.2 per cent in those waiting over 18 months. There were reductions in all the major specialities for the total waiting list and those waiting over 12 months.

The number of patients waiting for a first outpatient appointment fell by 2,254 (-1.2 per cent) with falls in all but one of the top five specialities.

Apart from December, the inpatient list has fallen every month since May and the outpatient list has fallen since September. We are now seeing the benefit of the additional investment provided in May 2000 and I expect to see further improvement in the coming months, although pressures, particularly on outpatient lists, remain high.

Hospital Waiting Lists (Progress Report)

Q23 Christine Gwyther: Can the Minister give a progress report on hospital waiting lists in Wales? (OAQ10459) *Withdrawn.*

Abolishing Health Authorities

Q24 Peter Black: What is the timetable for the abolition of health authorities, as announced in the NHS plan? (OAQ10502)

Jane Hutt: It is anticipated that the abolition of all health authorities will be complete by April 2003.

As a first priority, a structural change task and finish group, chaired by the director of NHS Wales, is being established to look at the implications of the abolition of health authorities and the means by which the Assembly and local health groups will take on their additional responsibilities.

Provision of Beta Interferon for MS Sufferers

Q25 Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on NHS provision of Beta Interferon for sufferers of multiple sclerosis in Wales? (OAQ10503)

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.

Waiting List Targets

Q26 Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on the waiting list targets that she has set? (OAQ10488)

Jane Hutt: Waiting list targets were agreed with the health authorities as a condition of receiving additional funding made available last May. Each of the five health authorities took responsibility for

managing delivery in their area, co-ordinating the effort and using the resources appropriately. Assembly officials are monitoring progress against the targets regularly.

Waiting lists are influenced by a number of elements, including changes in demand, capacity, practice and the ability of staff and patients to attend hospital. Unforeseeable movements in any of these can help or hinder efforts to reduce waiting lists.

Latest indications give grounds for optimism that NHS Wales can come very close to the key targets, but I cannot guarantee that.

Prescribing Anti-depressants, Tranquillisers and Similar Drugs

Q27 John Griffiths: What strategy will be followed to attempt to ensure that the prescription of anti-depressants, tranquillisers and similar drugs only occurs where strictly necessary and appropriate? (OAQ10532) *Withdrawn.*

Rhaglenni Hyfforddi Nyrsys

C28 Owen John Thomas: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar sefyllfa bresennol rhaglenni hyfforddi nyrsys yng Nghymru? (OAQ10458) [W]

Jane Hutt: Mae gan Gynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru drefniadau contractio â phum sefydliad addysg uwch ledled Cymru i ddarparu hyfforddiant cyn-gofrestru i nyrsys. Y llynedd gwelwyd cynnydd o 17 y cant yn niferoedd y nyrsys, bydwagedd ac ymwelwyr iechyd a hyfforddwyd, o'i gymharu â niferoedd 1999—a oedd o ganlyniad i gyllid ychwanegol a alluogodd inni gomisiynu 190 yn rhagor o leoedd hyfforddi. Bydd hyn yn cynyddu bob blwyddyn, hyd nes y bydd 760 o nyrsys ychwanegol yn cael eu hyfforddi yng Nghymru erbyn 2004. Yr ydym yn parhau i gynnig cyfleoedd i nyrsys cynorthwyol sydd yn dymuno hyfforddi fel nyrsys cofrestredig: recriwtiwyd 29 i'r cyrsiau hyfforddi cyn-gofrestru yn 2000 o dan y fenter i weithwyr gofal iechyd cynorthwyol. Yn ychwanegol at hyn, yr ydym yn hyrwyddo cyfleoedd i fuddsoddi mewn dysgu gydol oes a datblygu proffesiynol parhaus ar gyfer nyrsys, er mwyn sicrhau bod y gweithlu yn parhau wedi'i ysgogi ac yn ymateb i anghenion cyfnewidiol y gwasanaeth.

Nurse Training Schemes

Q28 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the present situation as regards nurse training schemes in Wales? (OAQ10458) [W]

Jane Hutt: The National Assembly for Wales contracts with five higher education institutions across Wales to deliver pre-registration nurse training. Last year saw a 17 per cent increase in the numbers of nurses, midwives and health visitors trained, compared with 1999—the result of additional funding, which enabled us to commission an additional 190 training places. This increase will continue year on year so that, by 2004, an additional 760 nurses will be trained in Wales. We continue to offer opportunities for nursing auxiliaries who wish to train as registered nurses: 29 were recruited on to pre-registration nurse training courses in 2000 under the healthcare support worker initiative. In addition, we are promoting investment in lifelong learning and continuing professional development for nurses, to ensure that the workforce remains motivated and responsive to the changing needs of the service.

The NHS Plan for Wales

Q29 Christine Gwyther: How does the NHS plan for Wales strike a balance between promoting good health and preventing sickness? (OAQ10441) *Withdrawn.*

Medical Student Numbers in Wales

Q30 Delyth Evans: Could the Minister give an update on medical student numbers in Wales? (OAQ10491)

Jane Hutt: There are currently 1,015 registered medical students on the roll at the University of Wales College of Medicine. That figure is set to rise to at least 1,385 students by 2004 as a result of our ambitious programme for medical undergraduate expansion set out in 'Improving Health in Wales: A Plan for the NHS with its Partners'. In addition to the centre at Cardiff, and the new clinical school at Swansea, we will be considering plans to expand medical education and research facilities at Bangor, Newport, Wrexham and the University of Glamorgan.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Reducing Bureaucratic Burdens on Schools

Q6 Christine Gwyther: What plans does the Minister have to reduce bureaucratic burdens on schools? (OAQ10435)

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): A project to investigate how bureaucratic burdens on schools can be reduced, led by a deputy headteacher on secondment to the Assembly, started last September. Its aim is to secure a sustainable policy of minimising burdens supported by all the stakeholders in schools. The research and initial consultation phase of the project is nearing completion. A report and action plan will be presented to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee in June and is due to be considered in Plenary on 10 July.

Extra Financial Allocations for Schools

Q7 Gwenda Thomas: Will there be a continuation of the extra financial allocation for schools in Wales in future years? (OAQ10476) *Withdrawn.*

Levels of Numeracy and Literacy in Rhondda Cynon Taff

Q8 Geraint Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on levels of numeracy and literacy in Rhondda Cynon Taff? (OAQ10520) [R]

Jane Davidson: We are committed to driving up standards of literacy and numeracy throughout Wales and have set challenging national targets for 2002 and 2004. The contribution that local education authorities make to the achievement of those standards is key.

National curriculum assessment results since 1997 show that primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taff have made consistent and strong progress. The proportion of pupils who have attained the expected levels at the end of primary school education has increased by an average of around 12 per cent over the past three years.

We know from its educational strategic plan that the authority is putting in place strategies, which will contribute towards even further gains. I commend the authority for its achievements.

Staff Recruitment and Retention

Q9 Gareth Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on issues surrounding staff recruitment and retention in the higher education sector in Wales? (OAQ10526)

Jane Davidson: All higher education institutions are independent autonomous bodies responsible for their own management, including the pay and conditions of employment of staff. The Assembly has no responsibility for these matters.

My letter of guidance to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales for 2001-02 makes clear, however, that I expect institutions to follow public sector policy by taking account of fairness and the need to recruit, motivate and retain staff.

A Small Schools Policy

Q10 Nick Bourne: Has the Minister given further consideration to developing an Assembly small schools policy? (OAQ10481)

Jane Davidson: I refer to my previous answers on this issue (OAQ9603) and (WAQ8650). There is nothing further to add at this stage.

Addressing Student Hardship

Q11 Delyth Evans: What is the Minister doing to address student hardship? (OAQ10486)

Jane Davidson: In order to help students who experience financial hardship, the Assembly provides all publicly funded further and higher education institutions in Wales with hardship funds. The purpose of these funds is to assist students who have serious financial difficulties while studying and to help those who are prevented from entering post-16 education in the first place because of financial reasons. In the current academic year, £8.974 million has been made available for this purpose, increasing to £11.525 million for 2001-02.

I have commissioned an independent investigation into student hardship and funding in Wales, dealing with the issues covered in the Scottish Cubie report, which fall within the Assembly's remit. The investigation is well underway, with the group's report expected by spring 2001.

Addressing the Deficit in Basic Skills

Q12 Alun Pugh: What plans does the Minister have to address the appalling deficit in basic skills in Wales? (OAQ10470) *Withdrawn.*

Combating Disaffection Among School Leavers

Q13 Geraint Davies: How is the Minister ensuring that there is a sustainable strategy to combat disaffection among school leavers in Wales? (OAQ10518) [R]

Jane Davidson: I refer you to the written answer that I gave to an identical question from Helen Mary Jones AM on 15 February 2001.

In addition to the programmes to which I referred in my written answer, I am also aware of the partnership for youth initiative operating in Rhondda Cynon Taff. As you will know, it is a scheme run by the Rhondda Cynon Taff youth offending team and the army cadet force for young people who offend. It focuses on elements such as leadership and team skills, respect for other people, self-control and discipline. Currently over 85 per cent of participants complete the course, 79 per cent do not go on to re-offend and social workers reported a positive change in 81 per cent of the participants.

The Impact of Education and Learning Wales

Q14 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement on the impact of Education and Learning Wales on communities across Wales? (OAQ10508) *Withdrawn.*

Combating the Rise in Truancy

Q15 Alison Halford: What actions has the Minister taken to combat the rise in truancy in schools in Wales? (OAQ10449)

Jane Davidson: Under 'Betterwales.com' we have set targets of reducing unauthorised absences from school by one third by 2004. That target is 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. Within an overall increase in GEST resources, £9.86 million has been made available for tackling social disadvantage for 2001-02. It will be for local authorities to decide how much of this is spent on school attendance and behaviour difficulties. Local education authorities have been invited to submit bids that demonstrate working through the Education Welfare Service in promoting school-based action to tackle attendance and behaviour difficulties, including truancy.

Guidance in tackling the issues surrounding school disaffection has been brought together in National Assembly Circular 3/99, 'Pupil Support and Social Inclusion'. The circular contains practical advice for schools and LEAs on preventative actions aimed at reducing truancy. Schools are asked to concentrate on early intervention, including first day contact with parents and establishing good working relationships with the Education Welfare Service and the police. The Assembly is also supporting the efforts of LEAs, which are required to set out local actions that are consistent with the target of reducing truancy in their educational strategic plans.

When pupils miss school, new powers under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 allow the police to return truants found in public places to school or to an area designated by the local education authority. In exercising those powers, the police are required to make a local truancy order, and such truancy sweeps have since taken place across Wales. In addition, new provisions in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 have increased the fine on parents from a maximum of £1,000 to £2,500, or imprisonment of up to three months, for a parent whose child does not attend school regularly. Nine schools in Wales have also received money from the Home Office crime reduction programme for pilot projects to combat truancy, with the aim of reducing juvenile crime

Developing a Rural Schools Policy

Q16 Richard Edwards: Can the Minister give a progress report on the development of a rural schools policy for Wales? (OAQ10433) *Withdrawn.*

The Development of Community Consortia for Education and Training

Q17 Alun Pugh: Will the Minister make a statement on the development of community consortia for education and training? (OAQ10477) *Withdrawn.*

An End to School Performance Tables (Consultation)

Q18 Alun Cairns: What consultations did the Minister conduct before announcing an end to school performance tables? (OAQ10478)

Jane Davidson: I have not announced the end of the schools' performance information tables. I have, however, announced my intention to issue proposals for the future arrangements for this data. A consultation paper will be issued at the beginning of April. Before drawing up the proposals I met with and listened to a number of headteachers and I believe that the paper reflects the views and addresses the concerns expressed during those discussions.

The Assembly's Policies on Funding Education

Q19 Peter Black: What action has the Minister taken to ensure that headteachers and school governors understand the Assembly's policies on funding education? (OAQ10452) [R]

Jane Davidson: I wrote to chairs of governing bodies and headteachers of all schools in Wales on 20 December 2000 to provide information on a range of funding issues and to clarify the Assembly's policies on funding of education and schools in Wales.

Combating Social Exclusion in North Wales Schools

Q20 Alison Halford: What actions has the Minister taken to combat social exclusion in our schools, particularly in north Wales? (OAQ10471)

Jane Davidson: The White Paper, 'Building Excellent Schools Together', emphasised the need to tackle under-achievement and social exclusion with children who have behavioural difficulties or are disaffected. Disaffected pupils who may be truanting or who are at risk of being excluded from school are more likely to become socially excluded. The prospects for such children are poor. Research shows that they may become engaged in risk-taking behaviour, such as substance and alcohol abuse, and are more likely to become involved in criminal activity in later life. That is why we support efforts to reduce absence and exclusion from school.

In 'Betterwales.com' the Assembly has set targets of reducing unauthorised absences and permanent exclusions by a third by 2004. In order to assist with achieving those targets, the National Assembly has issued guidance under Circular 3/99, 'Pupil Support and Social Inclusion', which sets out a range of school-based actions to address pupil disaffection and to challenge behavioural difficulties. In addition, all local education authorities have behavioural support plans to help schools to deal with children with behavioural difficulties who are at risk of exclusion.

Funding is available to LEAs under the grants for education support and training programme to support work in the area of school attendance and behaviour. This can be used to support curriculum development, staff training, specialist pastoral care, re-integration and training in behaviour management. A sum of £3 million was allocated to school attendance and behaviour in 2000-01 and, within an overall increase in GEST resources, £9.86 million has been made available for tackling social disadvantage for 2001-02. It is for local authorities to decide how that money is spent within their local priorities.

I have been pleased with recent reports from LEAs on their spending in this area during 2000-01, which show a number of interesting and innovative projects. In Flintshire, for instance, GEST resources have been used to fund behaviour support teachers covering all four key stages, and training for staff in behaviour management. A team was set up in Denbighshire to monitor behaviour support, social inclusion and school attendance and, in Powys, two team leaders were appointed to provide support and access to complementary and alternative curriculum options for disengaged pupils.

Reducing Paperwork for Teachers

Q21 Ann Jones: What action is the Minister taking to reduce paperwork for teachers? (OAQ0475)
Withdrawn.

The Pilot for the Welsh Baccalaureate

Q22 Brian Gibbons: Will the Minister give an update on the current situation regarding the pilot for the Welsh baccalaureate? (OAQ10440)

Jane Davidson: Arrangements for the pilot project are moving ahead as planned. The specification for the main development and management contract was issued to potential tenderers on 2 March. We hope to be able to make an announcement about the award of the contract in May. I wrote to the Chair and members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee setting this out on 7 March.

The New Code of Practice on Special Educational Needs

Q23 Cynog Dafis: Will the Minister make a statement on the latest situation with regard to the new code of practice on special educational needs? (OAQ10529)

Jane Davidson: Almost 200 responses have been received from interested parties in Wales to the Assembly's consultation on the draft revised special educational needs code. These are in the process of being considered for the impact that they will have on a further revised draft of the code, which, subject to the passage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill through Parliament, will come before the Assembly later this year, together with the necessary amendments to SEN regulations, for approval prior to publication and implementation in the 2001-02 school year.

The principal issue to emerge, and one on which several Members and Members of Parliament corresponded with me, relates to a proposal to replace the duty to 'specify' provision in statements of SEN with a duty instead to 'set out' provision. Many respondents were concerned that such a change would weaken parental safeguards and lead to less effective provision being made to meet their children's needs. Having considered those representations, I announced late last year that this particular proposal would be dropped from our plans to revise the code.

Early Years Education and Childcare Facilities

Q24 Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of early years education and childcare facilities in the Vale of Clwyd? (OAQ10474) *Withdrawn.*

Encouraging Poorer Students to Enter Higher and Further Education

Q25 Mick Bates: Will the Minister comment on the measures taken by the Assembly to encourage students from less well-off backgrounds to enter higher and further education? (OAQ10512)

Jane Davidson: The Assembly is committed to widening access to post-16 education for all those who have the ability to benefit from it and to particularly encourage 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 are prevented from entering post-16 education in the first place because of financial reasons and those who experience financial difficulties while studying. In the current academic year, £8.974 million has been made available for this purpose, increasing to £11.525 million for 2001-02.

The Assembly also looks to the Welsh funding councils to help it meet its aims of widening access to post-16 education. The funding councils have established a range of programmes and initiatives to promote the recruitment and retention of students from under-represented groups. I expect this to continue to be progressed in 2001-02 and beyond by the new organisation, Education and Learning Wales.

Supporting Students in Further Education Colleges

Q26 Cynog Dafis: What assistance will the Minister offer further education colleges to enable them to better identify and support students at risk of dropping out of courses in further education colleges in Wales? (OAQ10525)

Jane Davidson: The Further Education Funding Council for Wales has been remitted to work with FE institutions to secure improvements in levels of student attainment and retention. Colleges are aware of the number and diversity of issues influencing student retention. With the support of the council, they tackle these issues through:

adapting the curriculum to provide programmes that better meet students' needs and abilities, for example, courses with more practical content;
 improving communication between central student services and course teams;
 providing a tutorial support system;
 providing student support mechanisms, including childcare facilities, progression advice, basic and key skills support, and financial advice;
 monitoring attendance and contacting the parents of absent students (when appropriate); and
 setting and monitoring performance indicators at faculty and course level.

In addition, to help students experiencing financial hardship while studying, the Assembly provides all further education institutions in Wales with access funds. These funds are specifically aimed at helping students who would otherwise leave their courses because of financial difficulties (or who would be prevented from taking up their place for financial reasons). A sum of £4.2 million is available in the current academic year for this purpose, increasing to £6.1 million in 2001-02.

The Assembly has also commissioned an independent investigation into student hardship and funding in Wales. This covers further education students as well as those in higher education. The investigation is well underway and the group's report is expected by spring 2001.

Visits to Primary Schools in Mid and West Wales

Q27 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister list any visits that she has made to primary schools in the mid and west Wales area in 2001? (OAQ10480)

Jane Davidson: None as yet in mid or west Wales. I have received an open invitation from Kirsty Williams AM to visit schools in Brecon and Radnorshire and I hope to do so as soon as a suitable opportunity arises. Likewise, I am keen to visit schools in as many parts of Wales as possible, including west Wales, and again I will look to do so as soon as possible. In the meantime, I remain happy to consider any invitations that I receive individually from or in relation to particular schools.

Establishing Specialist Schools

Q28 Dafydd Wigley: Will the Minister make a statement on the establishment of specialist schools in Wales? (OAQ10523)

Jane Davidson: There are no plans to establish specialist schools in Wales. The recent Government's schools Green Paper, 'Schools: Building on Success', applies to England only.

Extra Cash for Welsh Schools

Q29 David Davies: Will Welsh schools enjoy the same extra cash as their English counterparts as a result of the 2001 budget? (OAQ10482)

Jane Davidson: No decisions have yet been taken about the use of additional funding coming to Wales as a result of the Chancellor's budget announcements. Announcements made by the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment about funding for schools relate only to England.

The Relationship between Voter Participation and Citizenship Education

Q30 Kirsty Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on the relationship between voter participation and citizenship education in schools? (OAQ10511)

Jane Davidson: Citizenship education is an important element of the framework for personal and social education, which was implemented in schools across Wales in September 2000, alongside the revised national curriculum for Wales.

The community aspect of the framework for personal and social education seeks to ensure that pupils explore their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. It also aims to promote among young people a political literacy that enables them to make effective decisions and judgements in the world of political and legal systems. I hope that this will help to promote fuller voter participation in the future.