

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 24 May 2000

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

Contents

- 1 Questions to the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development
Questions to the Secretary for Education and Children

Questions to the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development

Women in Rural Communities

Q4 Jane Davidson: What talks has Christine Gwyther had with women in rural communities and how will future policy development take account of their needs? (OAQ5245)

The Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development (Christine Gwyther): Assembly Officials are taking forward the 'Listening to Women' campaign in Wales and are meeting with women's organisations throughout Wales to identify their concerns about living and working in Wales.

A report will be prepared in June and will make recommendations on the future action to be taken by the National Assembly for Wales.

Afforestation in Wales

Q5 Brian Gibbons: What plans are there to increase afforestation in Wales as part of our response to the challenge of global warming? (OAQ5322)

Christine Gwyther: We are already expanding the woodland area in Wales. We now have approximately 14 per cent of our land area growing trees, higher than the UK average (10.2 per cent) and considerably higher than England (7 per cent). This area is increasing by some 600 hectares each year. These new woodlands will play a part in reducing global warming, by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and fixing it as part of their wood structure.

Of more importance is the sustainable management of our existing trees and woodlands. This is why we are preparing a woodland strategy for Wales, to direct the future of forestry in Wales so that we maximise the public benefits from all our woodlands. Well-managed woods provide a wide range of environmental, social, and economic benefits as well as their contribution to reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide, helping to reduce global warming. Using timber from the sustainable management of woodlands is also important in locking up carbon for as long as possible. The use of wood, rather than other building materials in construction, can also be more energy efficient.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Bill

Q6 John Griffiths: What influence is Christine Gwyther exerting on the United Kingdom Government to attempt to ensure the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill best reflects the particular needs of Wales? (OAQ5340)

Christine Gwyther: Responsibility for the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill now rests with the Assembly Secretary for Environment, Planning and Transport. I am aware that the UK Government has consulted the National Assembly for Wales and the Countryside Council for Wales on provisions of the Bill affecting Wales.

The Problem of Scab in Sheep

Q7 Peter Rogers: What proposals does Christine Gwyther have to assist farmers with the worsening problem of scab in sheep in Wales? (OAQ5341)

Christine Gwyther: Legislation already exists to help control of sheep scab. The Sheep Scab Order 1997 requires owners of sheep visibly affected with scab to treat them and all other sheep in the flock as soon as is reasonably practical. Effective treatments are available and it is in farmers' interests to be vigilant and to treat affected flocks quickly.

The Contribution of the Farming Industry in Wales

Q8 Janice Gregory: Can Christine Gwyther outline the overall contribution of the farming industry in Wales to the gross domestic product of Wales both before and after subsidies have been taken into account? (OAQ5337)

Christine Gwyther: The latest available figures show that in 1998, agriculture contributed 1.4 per cent to gross domestic product in Wales, including subsidies. If direct subsidies are excluded, the figure falls to 0.6 per cent. The impact of indirect support is more difficult to measure, but in round terms the overall contribution of agriculture excluding both direct subsidies and indirect support is estimated to be close to 0 per cent.

Converting Disused Farm Buildings

Q9 Phil Williams: Has Christine Gwyther had discussions about planning regulations in regard to converting disused farm buildings? (OAQ5334)

Christine Gwyther: National planning policy on the conversion and re-use of rural buildings is to be found in Planning Guidance (Wales): Planning Policy, First Revision (April 1999). The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee is currently carrying out a review of policies to encourage greater economic diversification in rural areas. The first stage of that review has indicated a need to look further into the impact of planning on rural diversification. Findings which emerge from the Committee's review will be taken into account by the Secretary for Environment, Planning and Transport, Sue Essex, in the review of planning policy guidance, which is currently in progress.

Establishing Wales as a GM Free Environment

Q10 Nick Bourne: Can Christine Gwyther report on any progress that is being made to establish Wales as a GM free environment? (OAQ5343)

Christine Gwyther: I refer you to the answer given to your written Assembly question, WAQ5400, issued earlier today.

Contracts for Welsh Lamb

Q11 Michael German: What discussions has Christine Gwyther had with the Ministry of Defence regarding contracts for Welsh lamb? (OAQ5258)

Christine Gwyther: Together with other colleagues in Government I have made representations to the Ministry of Defence to ensure that they are aware of the quality and availability of Welsh lamb to supply British forces. Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Ltd, whom the Assembly supports under the agri-food strategy, has also worked hard to convince the Ministry of Defence to take more Welsh lamb. Nevertheless, purchasing decisions by the Ministry are a matter for it in light of its operational needs.

However, I am pleased to report that the MOD currently buys 100 per cent British beef for its UK based personnel and has offered to commit to a substantial forward buy of lamb. The difficulties faced by the industry in securing a contract to supply the Ministry of Defence are based on price and availability of the frozen product. Forward pricing at a low enough price to satisfy the MOD is not easy because the industry would have difficulty meeting that commitment over a prolonged period of time at a lower price than could be obtained in the fresh retail market. The MOD is asking for blast frozen lamb.

The action plan for the lamb and beef sector, launched in March 1999 identified that the industry needs to compete with frozen New Zealand lamb. This is being taken forward through the development of the processing sector by Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Ltd under the umbrella of the National Assembly agri-food strategy led by the Agri-Food Partnership. Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Ltd will undertake a study of whether the seasonal glut of supply may make it worthwhile freezing Welsh lamb to compete with the frozen New Zealand product.

There are currently three freezer plants in Wales. The National Assembly and the Welsh Development Agency are ready to support viable development proposals through the provision of grant aid under schemes such as the marketing development scheme and will be making further grants available under the Rural Development Plan including a new processing and marketing grant which will come on-stream later this year. National Assembly officials would be happy to discuss and advise the industry with regard to any proposals. However the decision whether to proceed would be a commercial one. The licensing of new plants comes under the Food Standards Agency and it is unable to give incentives to processors to establish further freezing plants.

Sustainable Development Programmes

Q12 Ann Jones: What plans has Christine Gwyther to promote sustainable development programmes for areas of outstanding natural beauty in Wales? (OAQ5260)

Christine Gwyther: Up to £250,000 per year for the next three years will be made available from the environment development fund to support partnership sustainable development projects in Wales's five areas of outstanding natural beauty. Discussions are taking place with relevant organisations on the best means of distributing these funds.

Slaughter Houses in Wales

Q13 Janet Davies: How will the shortage of slaughter houses and abattoir facilities in Wales affect the debate on the traceability and labelling of meat products? (OAQ5328)

Christine Gwyther: Under the farm assured welsh livestock scheme the protocol for Welsh beef allows for slaughter in any approved abattoir. This does not affect traceability.

In addition, the EC is proposing a new beef labelling scheme. This will require all labelling to show the country of slaughter. This will be at the level of the member-state, so in the case of our beef, whether it is slaughtered in Wales or elsewhere in the UK, this will be the UK. The important thing is that we can and will be able to continue to label our beef as Welsh beef.

Meat Hygiene Inspection Charges

Q14 Kirsty Williams: What steps are being taken to reduce the financial burden of meat hygiene inspection charges on small slaughterhouses? (OAQ5282)

Christine Gwyther: Responsibility for meat hygiene inspections and the associated charges now falls to the Food Standards Agency, which is overseen by Jane Hutt AM.

Following the Pooley Group's report into burdens on the meat industry, the FSA has set up a task force to consider alternative ways of minimising costs faced by low throughput plants. The taskforce, on which Welsh interests are represented by Mr Bob Kennard, is due to provide its report by 31 May.

I am aware of the need to reduce the burden on small to medium sized abattoirs, which have an important part to play in delivering the Welsh agri-food strategy and which help to underpin the economic viability of the rural and agricultural economy. I will continue to press for fair treatment for the hard pressed small to medium sector and, indeed, all Welsh slaughterhouses.

The Waste Incineration Directive

Q15 David Davies: What measures does Christine Gwyther propose implementing to prevent the Waste Incineration Directive having a catastrophic effect on rural Wales? (OAQ5323) *Transferred for written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Planning & Transport*

The Secretary for the Environment, Planning and Transport (Sue Essex): The proposed waste incineration directive is now in the last stages of negotiations. It will not, however, affect existing incinerators for five years. We are looking at implementation options that will minimise the effect on small animal incinerators in rural Wales, while ensuring that there are appropriate environmental safeguards.

Measuring Progress in Sustainable Development

Q16 Brian Hancock: Why has there been no parallel consultation launched to set specific indicators and targets for progress to be measured in regard to the sustainable development document? (OAQ5331)

Christine Gwyther: Because we have not yet finalised our consultative proposals. As the First Secretary indicated recently, we hope to do so soon.

The Animal Traceability Discussions in Europe

Q17 Brian Hancock: What discussions has Christine Gwyther had with her Westminster counterpart about progress with the animal traceability discussions in Europe? (OAQ5326)

Christine Gwyther: I meet other Agriculture Ministers on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of agricultural issues, including animal traceability. Assembly officials are in regular contact with their counterparts in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the other devolved administrations regarding all aspects of EU requirements in relation to animal traceability.

GM Free Produce

Q18 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Has Christine Gwyther had discussion with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions concerning the marketing advantages of GM free produce? (OAQ5372)

Christine Gwyther: I indicated the scope of the conversation that I had with Michael Meacher, the Minister for the Environment, on 10 May in the statement that I made on that day. This also summarised the discussions between officials. No discussion has taken place with DETR regarding the marketing advantages for GM free produce as their remit does not cover this area. As you are aware, in Wales marketing of food falls to the Welsh Development Agency's Food Directorate with whom I and my officials are in regular contact.

The Trial Use of Genetically Modified Crops

Q19 Glyn Davies: When will Christine Gwyther next meet with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to discuss the trial use of genetically modified crops in Wales? (OAQ5360)

Christine Gwyther: I have no immediate plans to meet with DETR Ministers. I have discussed the farm scale evaluation programme with Michael Meacher and refer you to my statement of 10 May.

A Cross-Cutting Committee

Q20 Geraint Davies: Does Christine Gwyther intend to make a request for a cross-cutting committee that could sufficiently address the challenges presented in the sustainable development document? (OAQ5332)

Christine Gwyther: I have no present intention to do so. This is an issue on which some respondents to our consultation have commented, and I shall of course be giving careful consideration to responses in the round.

Visiting the European Commission

Q21 Glyn Davies: When is Christine Gwyther next planning to visit the European Commission? (OAQ5361)

Christine Gwyther: I will visit the European Commission next when I believe it is appropriate for me to do so and when official commitments permit. My officials are in regular contact with the Commission.

The Study by Agricultural Development Advisory Service Advisers

Q22 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Has Christine Gwyther seen the results of the study by agricultural development advisory service advisers into the viability of introducing a new applicants scheme for young farmers? (OAQ5367)

Christine Gwyther: No. ADAS is in the process of undertaking the fieldwork and preparation of data outlined in the paper considered by the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on 26 January. I will present the report and recommendations to the Committee in due course.

Authority over the Meat Hygiene Inspectors

Q23 Pauline Jarman: Has Christine Gwyther's department authority over the meat hygiene inspectors that regulate Welsh slaughterhouses and abattoirs? (OAQ5338)

Christine Gwyther: Meat Hygiene Inspectors are appointed by the Meat Hygiene Service. With effect from 1 April 2000 the MHS is a next steps agency of the Food Standards Agency, which is overseen by Jane Hutt AM.

The Safety of GM Crops

Q24 Peter Black: What evidence can Christine Gwyther provide to suggest that GM crops are safe to feed to farm animals? (OAQ5249)

Christine Gwyther: Genetically modified organisms are controlled by a range of legislation and regulation primarily emanating from the EU. This framework is stringent, precautionary and rigorously applied. In the UK the advice of independent committees and experts are a central part of the regulatory and appraisal process. These are both rigorous and effective and I am satisfied that the Assembly has

access to the highest quality scientific advice represented in these Groups and Committees. The Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs liaises with other relevant advisory committees as appropriate and provides advice to the Food Standards Agency and the four UK Agriculture Ministers on the safety and use of animal feeds and feeding practices, with particular emphasis on protecting human health and with reference to new technical developments.

Promoting Welsh Produce on the Internet

Q25 Peter Black: What action has so far been taken by the Assembly to promote Welsh produce over the internet? (OAQ5250)

Christine Gwyther: As part of the National Assembly's agri-food strategy the Welsh Development Agency Food Directorate has been developing its Internet strategy over the last six months and has a pilot site on the web which was launched at the end of March. It contains information for consumers, producers and trade buyers. This will be further developed during 2000 using feedback from the pilot site and an internet strategy developed with the assistance of consultants of international calibre and consultation with the industry and the Agri-Food Partnership. To protect the best web-site addresses and prevent 'spoiling' and other competitor activities, the Food Directorate has registered over two dozen generic internet domain names related to Welsh food and agricultural produce.

The WDA has been assisting agri-food companies to get on-line on an individual basis for a number of years and recognises the potential of the internet for the provision of information, communication with the agri-food sector and for facilitating e-commerce.

The Meat Hygiene Service

Q26 David Lloyd: Has Christine Gwyther received recent representations from small slaughter houses and/or abattoirs concerning the inspections carried out by the Meat Hygiene Service and their cost? (OAQ5336)

Christine Gwyther: Since responsibility for the Meat Hygiene Service transferred to the Food Standards Agency on 1 April this year, the only representations I have received refer to the closure of the Mead Webber abattoir in Herefordshire. This closure has implications for livestock producers in parts of mid Wales as well as the English border counties and I have made representations both to Nick Brown and the FSA. I understand that the FSA is to conduct an independent review into the circumstances behind the owners' decision to close the plant and I hope that that decision can be reversed. I look forward to seeing the result of that review.

Promoting and Supplying Local Products

Q27 David Lloyd: What efforts are being made to encourage local supermarkets to promote and supply locally produced products? (OAQ5374)

Christine Gwyther: I and my officials have been in correspondence with supermarkets and have had meetings during May with some of the major companies to discuss issues which arise from the farming crisis, including the questions of pricing and profit margins in the dairy production, processing and retail sectors and to consider what can be done to alleviate the situation.

Through the National Assembly, the Welsh Development Agency Food Directorate and the Agri-Food Partnership, work is continuously being carried out to promote the agri-food strategy. Through Market Channels (originally called the Producer Retailer Programme), which was set up 18 months ago, the Agri-Food Partnership is heavily involved in pursuing opportunities with all supermarkets in Wales to promote and encourage the supply of locally produced products. An example of this programme's success is the results it has achieved with Tesco stores in Wales in persuading the company to more than double its supply of Welsh product lines to its customers.

Genetically Modified Crop Trial Applications

Q28 Jocelyn Davies: What is Christine Gwyther's authority in regard to genetically modified crop trial applications within Wales? (OAQ5339)

Christine Gwyther: It is not possible for the Assembly to impose a general moratorium on GM crops in Wales. The Assembly's powers, and those of the UK Government, are constrained by international obligations. The commercial release of a GMO to the environment is determined at the EU wide level and once a product has an EU-wide approval, a member state can only provisionally restrict or prohibit the use and/or sale of that product if it has justifiable reasons to consider that the product constitutes a risk to human health or the environment. This was explained in the paper I presented to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on 15 December last year.

Specified Risk Materials

Q29 Pauline Jarman: Has Christine Gwyther had discussions with Nick Brown regarding the European Commission's efforts to categorise specified risk materials? (OAQ5329)

Christine Gwyther: I recently met Nick Brown to discuss a range of issues of common interest in the agricultural sector including the European Commission proposal for dealing with specified risk material. Assembly officials maintain close contact with their counterparts in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and are being kept fully informed on the current negotiations within the European Commission.

The Problems Facing Farming

Q30 Jenny Randerson: When did Christine Gwyther last meet with the representatives from supermarkets to discuss the problems facing farming? (OAQ5280)

Christine Gwyther: I and my officials have been in correspondence with supermarkets and have had meetings during May with some of the major companies to discuss issues which arise from the farming crisis, including the questions of pricing and profit margins in the dairy production, processing and retail sectors and to consider what can be done to alleviate the situation.

Through the National Assembly, the Welsh Development Agency Food Directorate and the Agri-Food Partnership, work is continuously being carried out to promote the agri-food strategy. Through Market Channels (originally called the Producer Retailer Programme), which was set up 18 months ago, the Agri-Food Partnership is heavily involved in pursuing opportunities with all supermarkets in Wales to promote and encourage the supply of locally produced products. An example of this programme's success is the results it has achieved with Tesco stores in Wales in persuading the company to more than double its supply of Welsh product lines to its customers.

Questions to the Secretary for Education and Children

Maintaining Teaching Standards

Q7 Cynog Dafis: How will the Secretary for Education and Children ensure that teaching standards in Wales are maintained? (OAQ5304)

The Secretary for Education and Children (Rosemary Butler): There is a range of measures to help teachers reach and maintain high standards; these include work on a new performance management framework and the provision of financial support for continuing professional development.

High Standard Teaching (Primary Classrooms)

Q8 Brian Hancock: What plans does Rosemary Butler have to ensure that teaching in our primary classrooms is of the highest standard? (OAQ5314)

Rosemary Butler: I will continue the strong focus on literacy and numeracy in primary classrooms. Guidance has already been published on the effective teaching of these skills in primary schools since they are central to all other aspects of learning. My department will continue to support continuing professional development of teachers.

Additional Funding for Trainee Teachers

Q9 Michael German: Has Rosemary Butler had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment about obtaining additional funding for trainee teachers in Wales? (OAQ5264)

Rosemary Butler: The training and teaching grants which I announced on 12 April will be made by utilising powers contained in Section 50 of the Education (No.2) Act 1986. This makes provision for regulations to be made for the payment of grants to facilitate and encourage the training of teachers. The relevant section of this Act was transferred to the National Assembly for Wales by the Transfer of Functions Order 1999. The Department for Education and Employment thus has no role in the provision of resources for these grants.

Cutting Class Sizes

Q10 Ann Jones: What progress has Rosemary Butler made in cutting class sizes and will she make a statement? (OAQ5266)

Rosemary Butler: The number of children in infant classes of over 30 dropped from 30,734 in January 1998 to 9,236 in September 1999, a reduction of 70 per cent. Allocation of £15.8 million grant this year should enable local education authorities to remove all of the remaining infant classes of over 30 pupils by September 2001.

The numbers of junior pupils in classes of over 30 reduced from 47,917 in January 1999 to 45,785 in September 1999 as a result of general increases in funding for schools through successive local government revenue settlements.

A primary school class size count will be conducted in September, so that we can monitor progress.

Financial Incentives for Students (Primary Education)

Q11 Kirsty Williams: Will Rosemary Butler reconsider her decision not to provide financial incentives for students training for primary education? (OAQ5275)

Rosemary Butler: The training and teaching grants which I announced on 12 April for those studying on secondary level PGCE courses are concentrated on the areas of greatest need. Wales has a good supply of primary teachers, and initial teacher training providers here have consistently met intake targets for their primary courses. In secondary subjects, initial teacher training providers have had difficulties meeting intake targets for some time. The scheme will be reviewed in 2001-02 to measure its effectiveness and we will consider if any changes need to be made at that point.

Incentives for Graduates Entering Primary School Teaching

Q12 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Does Rosemary Butler have any plans to introduce incentives for graduates to enter primary school teaching? (OAQ5319)

Rosemary Butler: The training and teaching grants which I announced on 12 April for those studying on secondary level PGCE courses will be reviewed in 2001-02 to measure their effectiveness and we will consider if any changes need to be made at that point.

The Special Educational Needs Register

Q13 Janice Gregory: Will Rosemary Butler make a statement on the current guidelines issued to local authorities detailing the recommended length of time it was thought a statemented pupil should remain on the special educational needs register? (OAQ5345)

Rosemary Butler: Under the Education Act 1996, local education authorities are responsible for preparing and maintaining statements of special educational needs (SEN) for children for whom they are responsible. In doing so, they are required to have regard to the guidance contained in the Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of SEN which came into operation in September 1994. A copy of the Code of Practice is in the Assembly Library.

The length of time that a child for whom an LEA is responsible remains in receipt of a statement will depend on the individual circumstances of the case and is not prescribed in the legislation or associated guidance. Under the legislation, LEAs are required to review a statement at least annually. If in the process of their review they believe that it is no longer necessary for them to maintain a statement it is open to them to write to the child's parents giving notice of their decision to cease to maintain it. In such cases, parents have a right of appeal to the independent SEN Tribunal if they disagree with the LEAs decision.

Teacher Vacancies

Q14 Pauline Jarman: What discussions has Rosemary Butler had with schools regarding teacher vacancies? (OAQ5299)

Rosemary Butler: I have had discussions with many parties regarding teacher vacancies and recruitment. Vacancy rates in Welsh maintained schools are low. The school teachers review body reported in February that there were significant numbers of applicants for every vacancy and that schools were satisfied with appointees in the 'vast majority' of cases. I have however announced the introduction of training and teaching grants in Wales for those studying on secondary level PGCE courses because we want to encourage more and better graduates into initial teacher training and then on into teaching.

Personal and Social Education Guidelines for Wales

Q15 David Davies: What progress has been made on drafting new personal and social education guidelines for Wales? (OAQ5294)

Rosemary Butler: The framework for personal and social education was approved unanimously by the National Assembly for Wales following a Plenary debate on 19 January.

School Governors (Black and Ethnic Communities)

Q16 Helen Mary Jones: What percentage of school governors are from black and ethnic minority communities? (OAQ5301)

Rosemary Butler: Information on the ethnicity of school governors is not collected currently. I am looking at possible mechanisms for collecting such information, possibly in the annual school census. I am keen to see black and ethnic communities properly represented on school governing bodies. Assembly officials are in contact with Governors Wales and LEAs on school governor recruitment needs, and will be looking at ways of making governing bodies more representative of the communities they serve.

Resorting to Parental Contributions to Meet National Curriculum Obligations

Q17 Alun Cairns: Does Rosemary Butler expect schools to have to resort to parental contributions to be used to meet the obligations of the national curriculum? (OAQ5356)

Rosemary Butler: Under the Education Act 1996 neither the pupil nor his or her parents may be required to pay for, or to supply, any materials, books, instruments or other equipment for use in connection with education provided at no charge at a maintained school during school hours. The same applies to a syllabus for a prescribed public examination for which the pupil is being prepared at the school.

Introduction of Salaries for Trainee Teachers

Q18 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will Rosemary Butler make a statement regarding the introduction of salaries for trainee teachers? (OAQ5316)

Rosemary Butler: I announced on 12 April details of training and teaching grants to be introduced in Wales for those studying on secondary level PGCE courses as part of a range of measures to boost teacher recruitment.

Attracting High Quality Teachers

Q19 Janet Davies: What plans does Rosemary Butler have to ensure that schools in Wales are equally able to attract high quality teachers into the classrooms as those in England? (OAQ5317)

Rosemary Butler: I announced on 12 April details of training and teaching grants to be introduced in Wales for those studying on secondary level PGCE courses as part of a range of measures to boost teacher recruitment. These grants are joint elements aimed at encouraging more and better graduates into initial teacher training and then on into teaching. Graduates entering teacher training do not have to pay fees either. I believe that with the prospects of earning higher classroom salaries as well, all this will be an attractive proposition to those moving from college to a career.

Primary School Standards (Recruitment Difficulties)

Q20 Cynog Dafis: How will Rosemary Butler ensure that recruitment difficulties do not threaten standards in primary schools? (OAQ5305)

Rosemary Butler: Vacancy rates in Welsh maintained schools are low. Wales has a good supply of primary teachers, and initial teacher training providers here have consistently met intake targets for their primary courses.

Promoting a Consistent Schools Strategy in Rural Wales

Q21 Richard Edwards: What steps is Rosemary Butler taking to promote a consistent schools strategy in the rural areas of Wales? (OAQ5255)

Rosemary Butler: The administration of rural schools is the responsibility of local education authorities.

In making a judgment about provision of schools, in rural or urban areas, local education authorities must take into account: future demand for places; the overall cost effectiveness of the education service, including the effect of retaining surplus places; the ability of schools to provide a satisfactory standard of education across the curriculum for all age groups; the scope for parental choice; the interaction between schools and their local communities; and travelling times. Consultation must take place prior to the publication of statutory notices which propose changes to school provision.

The Pre-16 Education Committee is about to commence a study of the supply of school places, during which the future of small rural schools will undoubtedly be discussed.

Primary Teacher Training Places for Postgraduates

Q22 Kirsty Williams: How many places will be available in the academic year 2000-01 in Wales for postgraduates to train for primary teaching? (OAQ5274)

Rosemary Butler: 495

School Inspections (Teacher Stress)

Q23 Mick Bates: Has Rosemary Butler had any discussions with teaching organisations to discuss the levels of stress experienced by teachers during school inspections? (OAQ5276)

Rosemary Butler: I discuss matters to do with school inspections with the teaching organisations from time to time. I have not held discussions specifically on this issue.

A National Childcare Helpline

Q24 Janet Ryder: Can Rosemary Butler make a statement on any developments regarding having a national childcare helpline in Wales? (OAQ5298)

Rosemary Butler: A meeting was held on 2 May between Assembly officials, Choices in Childcare, Chwarae Teg, Children in Wales and Wrexham's children's information bureau to discuss the development of children's information services in Wales. The possibility of developing a national helpline is being considered in the light of these discussions.

Extra Resource Needs for Bilingual Schools

Q25 Jane Davidson: What discussions has Rosemary Butler had with local authorities about the need to recognise in the funding formula the extra resource needs of bilingual schools? (OAQ5251)

Rosemary Butler: Peter Law has responsibility for local government finance and the review of the revenue funding formula. The National Assembly-local government working group undertaking the review has been asked to examine the 23 recommendations made in the University of Wales, Swansea report on the present formula. The case for a separate spending assessment for bilingual schools was not made in that report and is not therefore being considered by the joint working group.

Attracting Science and Language Teachers

Q26 Peter Rogers: Will Rosemary Butler report on the success of schemes to attract science and language teachers into schools in Wales? (OAQ5352)

Rosemary Butler: The training and teaching grants for the shortage subjects for maths and science commenced for those entering initial teacher training in September 1999. Students on those courses have yet to gain qualified teacher status and enter teaching. The extension to that scheme to encompass modern foreign languages and Welsh was due to commence in September 2000, but the whole scheme has now been superseded by the new training and teaching grants which I announced on 12 April. The new scheme will be reviewed in 2001-02 to measure its effectiveness.

Reducing Secondary School Pupil Teacher Ratios

Q27 David Melding: What action is Rosemary Butler taking to reduce secondary school pupil teacher ratios? (OAQ5252)

Rosemary Butler: No direct action. The average class size in maintained secondary schools in Wales was 20.7 in 1998-99 and has not changed significantly in recent years.

Creating Local Childcare Information Services

Q28 David Lloyd: Have there been any developments towards creating local childcare information services in Wales? (OAQ5296)

Rosemary Butler: A meeting was held on 2 May with Choices in Childcare, Chwarae Teg, Children in Wales and Wrexham's children's information bureau to discuss the development of children's information services in Wales. Consideration is currently being given to the proposals made at that meeting.

Stewart Report (Siting Mobile Phone Masts near Schools)

Q29 Lorraine Barrett: Can Rosemary Butler outline what discussions she has had with the Secretary for Transport, Planning and the Environment in the light of the Stewart report, in particular with regard to the siting of mobile phone masts in close proximity to schools? (OAQ5292)

Rosemary Butler: I have discussed with both the Secretary for the Environment, Planning and Transport and the Secretary for Health and Social Services the findings of the Stewart report and its implications for our respective responsibilities.

Educating Asylum Seekers

Q30 Peter Black: What is Rosemary Butler's estimate of the additional cost to local education authorities of educating asylum seekers housed in Wales? (OAQ5256)

Rosemary Butler: No asylum seekers have been dispersed to Wales so far and the dispersal arrangements are not expected to be fully operational until the autumn.

I am aware of the concerns of local authorities in Wales regarding the education of school age asylum seekers. I have made it clear to those authorities with which I have had discussions that when more precise information becomes available, I will be prepared to consider with them how best we can respond to their educational needs.