

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 27 November 2002

[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
- 3 Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Asthma in Wales

Q9 David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on the future management of asthma in Wales? (OAQ20614)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): There are currently no specific future plans for asthma in Wales. However, this will be taken into account as part of the overall review of Assembly health policies.

I recently met with the National Asthma Campaign to discuss its work and to identify ways in which the Assembly can assist the campaign in highlighting awareness of asthma across Wales. Officials are also liaising with the National Asthma Campaign to arrange a cross-party reception in the Assembly bay building.

Although much of the work regarding smoking is not devolved, the Assembly is also working to develop a Welsh passive smoking campaign, and the National Asthma Campaign will be involved in this.

Holywell Hospital

Q10 Alison Halford: When does the Minister expect a private finance initiative project for Holywell Hospital to be finalised? (OAQ20542)

Jane Hutt: The potential for a private finance initiative solution will be considered within the scheme's business case. The trust expects the formal submission to be made in the new year after consideration by North Wales Health Authority. The planning and construction phases for centrally funded and PFI schemes are likely to be different, but the total time taken, from the start of the design stage to commissioning the new facility, is generally the same.

Recruitment and Retention of NHS Nurses

Q11 Geraint Davies: What additional money will the Minister introduce this year for the recruitment and retention of NHS nurses? (OAQ20609)

Jane Hutt: The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to substantially increasing nursing numbers. By 2010, we aim to recruit an additional 6,000 nurses, an increase of 24 per cent over eight years. Progress towards meeting the targets will be funded from the revenue allocations, to be made annually to local health boards and through the Assembly's NHS education and training budget, which will increase by £21 million in 2003-04 to help further increase the numbers of medical and other health profession students.

Winter Months

Q12 Christine Chapman: What preparations are in place in the NHS in Wales to deal with additional pressures over the winter months? (OAQ20539)

Jane Hutt: Of the extra £20 million funding package made available this year, £7 million is included to ease emergency pressures, supporting initiatives that give maximum benefit to patients and service users. Emergency pressures planning guidance is also available on the NHS Wales internet site and includes details of the Keep Well This Winter campaign, encouraging flu immunisation for at-risk groups. In addition, organisations are, for the first time, using a capacity-mapping model, which seeks to predict demand and identify resources, trends and constraints within the system, with a view to the introduction of proactive management of emergency care. Work on dealing with emergency admissions is being taken forward through the innovations in care programme, which is introducing and spreading best practice across Wales.

Diabetes in Wales

Q13 David Lloyd: Will the Minister be announcing new measures with regard to the management of diabetes in Wales in the near future? (OAQ20615)

Jane Hutt: The Welsh Assembly Government has published the national service framework standards for diabetes in Wales. The framework will help to achieve better standards of care and support for people with diabetes, and work towards reducing the inequalities in health associated with diabetes.

I have set up a diabetes implementation group drawn from all interest groups, including the voluntary sector and lay representatives, to consider the implications for services in Wales and to advise on the delivery strategy. To inform the strategy, the Assembly has asked the Audit Commission to carry out a baseline review of services, and Market Research Wales has conducted a series of focus group meetings encompassing all levels of the service.

Also, in line with the recommendations of the UK National Screening Committee, an all-Wales diabetic retinopathy screening programme is being set up and a national co-ordinating centre will be established.

Financial Position of the NHS in Wales

Q14 Jocelyn Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the current financial position of the NHS in Wales? (OAQ20608)

Jane Hutt: Details of the current NHS financial position were provided in my monthly report to the Health and Social Services Committee on 20 November. Current forecasts indicate an operating deficit for 2002-03 of between £42.5 million and £59 million, compared with a budgeted provision of £39.7 million.

Mental Health Bill

Q15 Val Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement about the implementation of the mental health Bill? (OAQ20641)

Jane Hutt: The extensive consultation gave rise to around 2,000 responses from stakeholders and these are detailed and complex. My officials remain in close contact with the Department of Health as it considers the responses. The UK Government will introduce the Bill when parliamentary time allows. Further information will be given out as decisions are reached on this.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds

Q6 Rosemary Butler: Will the Minister report on the consultation process to be undertaken with regard to the curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds? (OAQ20569)

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): The consultation paper 'Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19', setting out the Welsh Assembly Government's proposals for the future shape of the phase of learning for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales, was published on 29 October 2002 and debated in Plenary on 12 November 2002.

Consultation, inside and outside the Assembly, has been ongoing since the project began in May 2002. We have worked hard to ensure that all stakeholders, including young people, have had an opportunity to shape the proposals. This will continue, with a range of conferences, meetings and formal and informal events involving all sectors, until 7 February 2003, when the formal consultation period comes to an end.

'Ein Hiaith: Ei Dyfodol'

C7 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: A oes swm o arian yn y gyllideb addysg er mwyn ariannu ymateb y Cabinet i argymhellion yr adroddiad 'Ein Hiaith: Ei Dyfodol'? (OAQ20647) [W]

Jane Davidson: Bydd y Gweinidog dros Ddiwylliant, Chwaraeon a'r Gymraeg yn gwneud datganiad yn y Cyfarfod Llawn heddiw. Bydd yn disgrifio sut y mae Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru yn bwriadu bwrw ymlaen â'i chynllun gweithredu ar gyfer yr iaith Gymraeg ar draws portffolios nifer o Weinidogion, yn unol â'r hyn a nodwyd yn 'Dyfodol Dwyieithog: Bilingual Future'.

'Our Language: Its Future'

Q7 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Is money available in the education budget to fund the Cabinet's response to the recommendations made in 'Our Language: Its Future'? (OAQ20647) [W]

Jane Davidson: The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language, will be making a statement to Plenary today, She will set out how the Welsh Assembly Government proposes to take forward its action plan for the Welsh language across a range of ministerial portfolios, as signalled in 'Dyfodol Dwyieithog: Bilingual Future'.

School Funding Formula

Q8 Cynog Dafis: Has a timetable been set for the consultation on revisions to regulations governing the school funding formula, due to take place next year? (OAQ20623)

Jane Davidson: Pre-consultation discussions with key partners, such as the Welsh Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Education in Wales, Governors Wales and the teaching unions, are already in progress. Formal consultation with local education authorities, schools and all other interested parties will begin early in 2003, with a view to new regulations applying for the financial year 2004-05.

Assembly Learning Grant

Q9 Eleanor Burnham: How many Assembly learning grants have been awarded? (OAQ20635)

Jane Davidson: Information received in the last fortnight from local education authorities indicates that 13,640 students had been awarded Assembly learning grants averaging £1,083 by the end of October.

Broadband in Schools

Q10 Mick Bates: How many schools in Wales have access to broadband? (OAQ20550)

Jane Davidson: The Assembly measures broadband connectivity for local education authority maintained schools against the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency suggested levels of 8Mb for secondary schools and 2Mb for primary schools. From a total of 1,819 schools in Wales, 107 primary and secondary schools reached the benchmark in March 2002, and this total is expected to rise to 867 by March 2003.

Using PFI to Build New Schools

Q11 Cynog Dafis: What are the advantages to local education authorities of PFI as a financial source to build new schools? (OAQ20648)

Jane Davidson: It is up to the contracting authority to carry out a rigorous economic appraisal to compare the PFI proposal with conventional procurement approaches. By leaving the private sector to determine how to deliver the service, the awarding authority is able to transfer certain risks that would traditionally be borne by the awarding authority such as construction costs over-runs and availability.

Truancy and School Absences

Q12 Jocelyn Davies: Is the Minister confident of meeting her targets with regard to truancy and school absences? (OAQ20624)

Jane Davidson: The report from the task and finish group that I set up to look at attendance issues recognised that meeting the attendance target for 2004 represented a major challenge. The group also recommended that we should review the way we record absences, since the distinction between authorised and unauthorised absences is not being recorded consistently, in practice, throughout Wales. The new Education Act 2002 allows us to set targets on total absence rates. A working group will be set up to look at these issues as well as our approach on current targets.

Secondary Schools in Flintshire

Q13 David Ian Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the funding of secondary schools in Flintshire? (OAQ20558)

Jane Davidson: Funding for schools' budgets is provided for in the local government revenue settlement. As reported to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee in July, local authorities increased their education budgets for 2002-03 by around 6.8 per cent, or £101 million. Flintshire County Council increased its education budget by 8.6 per cent. Provisional details of the revenue settlement for 2003-04 will be announced on 28 November.

We have made £36 million available to local education authorities as school building improvement grant for 2002-03. Flintshire council's allocation is around £1.8 million. That is additional to unhypothecated general capital funding, which the authority receives from the Assembly.

Learning for Young People

Q14 Val Lloyd: Can the Minister make a statement about her proposals to improve and encourage learning for young people between the ages of 14 and 19? (OAQ20649)

Jane Davidson: The consultation paper 'Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19', setting out the Welsh Assembly Government's proposals for the future shape of the phase of learning for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales, was published on 29 October 2002, and was debated in Plenary on 12 November 2002.

Post-16 Learners

Q15 Tom Middlehurst: What progress has Education and Learning Wales made in increasing the number of post-16 learners? (OAQ20568)

Jane Davidson: As the question is essentially the same as that posed by Christine Chapman in OAQ19698, I refer you to my reply in the Record of Proceedings for 30 October 2002.