

**Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary
28 June 2000**

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

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Questions to the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development

Protecting Family Farms

Q4 Kirsty Williams: What discussions has Christine Gwyther had regarding protecting family farms? (OAQ6064)

The Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development (Christine Gwyther): My primary concern, and that of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, is protecting family farms in Wales. I have ongoing discussions with the farming industry and other key organisations, both in Wales and beyond, including the retail sector, about how the National Assembly can best assist and safeguard family farms.

South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee Funding

Q5 Pauline Jarman: How is the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee funded. (OAQ6072) [R]

Christine Gwyther: Sea Fisheries committees are financed by an agreed levy charged to the constituent councils in percentage proportions set down in the individual Orders which create each Sea Fisheries Committee.

Tir Mynydd (South Wales Valleys)

Q6 Jane Davidson: What discussions has Christine Gwyther had with relation to Tir Mynydd and its effects on hill farmers in the south Wales valleys. (OAQ6050)

Christine Gwyther: I have met representatives of the farming unions and the Wales Young Farmers Clubs in recent weeks to discuss Tir Mynydd and its effect on all hill farmers in Wales. I have not had discussions specifically with, or about, hill farmers in the south Wales valleys.

Tlodi Gwledig

C7 Helen Mary Jones: A yw Christine Gwyther wedi derbyn cynrychiolaethau diweddar ynghylch tlodi gwledig? (OAQ6151)

Yr Ysgrifennydd Amaethyddiaeth a Datblygu Gwledig (Christine Gwyther): Mae llawer o'r sylwau yr wyf yn eu derbyn mewn perthynas â chefn gwlad Cymru'n cynnwys trafodaeth o'r problemau sydd yn gysylltiedig â thlodi. Yr wyf yn llwyr gydnabod yr angen i wneud defnydd llawn o'r ystod eang o fesurau a gynigiwyd yn nogfennau rhaglennu sengl Amcan 1 a 2, rhaglen weithredol Amcan 3 a'r cynllun datblygu gwledig, yn ogystal â rhaglenni domestig fel Rhoi Cymunedau'n Gyntaf, er mwyn mynd i'r afael ag achosion sylfaenol tlodi a hybu cymunedau gwledig ffyniannus a chynaliadwy.

Rural Poverty

Q7 Helen Mary Jones: Has Christine Gwyther received any representations recently regarding rural poverty? (OAQ6146)

Christine Gwyther: Many representations I receive concerning rural Wales include discussion about the problems associated with poverty. I recognise fully the need to make full use of the wide range of measures proposed in the Objective 1 and 2 single programming documents, the Objective 3 operational programme and the rural development plan, together with domestic programmes such as Communities First, to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and promote prosperous and sustainable rural communities.

Hyrwyddo Buddiannau'r Economi Wledig

C8 Cynog Dafis: Sut mae Christine Gwyther yn bwriadu hyrwyddo buddiannau'r economi wledig? (OAQ6151)

Christine Gwyther: Yr angen i ddod â'r dirywiad economaidd i ben a hybu economi wledig gynaliadwy yw sail yr holl waith a wnawn i ddatblygu a gweithredu polisïau sydd yn effeithio ar yr ardal. Er enghraifft, mae'r broses o ddatblygu rhaglenni Ewropeaidd sydd o fudd i Gymru wledig, megis Amcan 1 a 2 a'r cynllun datblygu gwledig, yn cydnabod yn llwyr yr angen i hybu buddiannau'r economi wledig ac ymdrin â'r heriau penodol ac amrywiol sydd yn wynebu'i chymunedau.

Promoting the Interests of the Rural Economy

Q8 Cynog Dafis: How does Christine Gwyther intend to promote the interests of the rural economy? (OAQ6151)

Christine Gwyther: The need to halt economic decline and promote a sustainable rural economy underpins the development and delivery of all our policies impacting on the area. For example, the development of European programmes of benefit to rural Wales, such as Objective 1 and 2 and the rural development plan, recognise fully the need to promote the interests of the rural economy and address the specific and diverse challenges facing its communities.

Sustainable Development Programmes (Clwydian Range)

Q9 Ann Jones: What plans does Christine Gwyther have to promote sustainable development programmes for the Clwydian Range area of outstanding natural beauty using money from the environment development fund and other sources? (OAQ6092)

Christine Gwyther: I refer you to my answer of 24 May (OAQ5260).

Allocating Extra Resources to Tir Gofal

Q10 Nick Bourne: Does Christine Gwyther have any plans to allocate extra resources to the Tir Gofal scheme? (OAQ6052)

Christine Gwyther: The budget for Tir Gofal for 2000-01 has already been increased from an initial allocation of £4 million to £7.5 million, and for 2001-02 from £7 million to £10.9 million. Modulation of direct subsidy payments to farmers from 2001 onwards will also provide additional funds for the scheme.

Sheep Population in Wales

Q11 Janice Gregory: What was the population of sheep in Wales in 1989-90 and what factors does Christine Gwyther attribute to the increase or decrease in this number by 1999-2000? (OAQ6087)

Christine Gwyther: In 1989 the total number of sheep and lambs in Wales was just under 10,755,000, of which about 5,111,000 were breeding ewes. In 1999 there were about 11,770,000 sheep and lambs, of which roughly 5,900,000 were breeding ewes.

The availability of subsidy under the sheep annual premium scheme is generally considered to be the main factor contributing to the increase in sheep numbers during this period. Because the sheep annual premium scheme is a headage payment, farmers have had an incentive to focus more on the quantity, rather than the quality, of animals.

Rural Development Proposals

Q12 Michael German: What plans does Christine Gwyther have to meet with other Agriculture Ministers from the UK to discuss the European Union's rejection of the Assembly's rural development proposals? (OAQ6089)

Christine Gwyther: The European Union has not rejected the proposals set out in the Assembly's rural development plan. It has asked for a number of amendments to be made to the proposals, including those relating to Tir Mynydd, the new scheme for compensatory payments to farmers in less favoured areas in Wales. I met other UK Agriculture Ministers on 14 June to discuss this and other issues.

Controlling Sheep Scab in Wales

Q13 Peter Rogers: Will Christine Gwyther report on the control of sheep scab in Wales? (OAQ6100) [R]

Christine Gwyther: I refer you to my answer to your oral Assembly question OAQ5341 answered on 24 May. Legislation already exists to control sheep scab.

The Burns Inquiry

Q14 Alun Cairns: What representation is Christine Gwyther making to the Secretary of State for Wales and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in light of the Burns inquiry? (OAQ6099)

Christine Gwyther: I am studying the report and will make any representations I feel necessary in the light of its findings and any further information on the legislative options which are being considered as a result of the report.

Banning Recreational Hunting (The Assembly's Role)

Q15 John Griffiths: What role will the Assembly play in the debate on banning recreational hunting prior to the forthcoming vote on the issue in the House of Commons? (OAQ6051)

Christine Gwyther: Hunting is not a devolved issue and any ban would require primary legislation. However, the Assembly will be consulted at every stage of this process and, under section 33 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, can make representations on any issue affecting Wales that it deems necessary.

Proposals for Tir Mynydd

Q16 Mick Bates: When did Christine Gwyther last meet with officials in Brussels to discuss the European Union's rejection of the Assembly's proposals for Tir Mynydd and will she make a statement? (OAQ6101) [R]

Christine Gwyther: The EU has not rejected the Assembly's proposals for Tir Mynydd; rather, it has asked for a number of amendments to be made to one element of the proposals. I was represented at a

meeting in Brussels in May to discuss the necessary amendments, and since then my officials have been working closely with the European Commission in an attempt to agree revised proposals.

Agriculture's Contribution to Rural Wales

Q17 Jocelyn Davies: Apart from its economic activity, will Christine Gwyther make a statement on how agriculture contributes to rural Wales? (OAQ6074)

Christine Gwyther: Agriculture's contribution to rural Wales goes much wider than a narrow measure of economic inputs and outputs. For example, it has a leading role in terms of employment in the remoter rural areas, sustaining rural services and communities as well as contributing to tourism and the environment. That is why we are working closely with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, and with the industry generally, to help farmers diversify and move towards the production of higher value products. In addition, our rural development plan includes comprehensive support for agri-environment and forestry measures, less favoured areas and food marketing and processing.

Encouraging Young People to Set up SMEs

Q18 Richard Edwards: What plans does Christine Gwyther have to encourage young people to set up small and medium sized enterprises in rural communities? (OAQ6063)

Christine Gwyther: Some important measures are already in place to assist here. One key initiative is the new business starts programme, managed by the training and enterprise councils, which aims to help good quality new ventures to start-up, grow and survive longer term. The support provided—which includes training in essential business skills, help with the development of a robust business plan and on-going mentoring and advisory support, including monitoring visits—applies across Wales, including to young people in rural communities. Also, under the Government's New Deal for young people, those wishing to pursue self-employment are supported via the Prince's Trust Wales.

In addition the new entrepreneurship action plan for Wales aims to help secure both a stronger culture of enterprise across Wales and a much higher level of new business starts, utilising support under Objective 1 and the other European structural funds. This should provide a real boost to the current level of activity in rural and other parts of Wales.

The Survival of Small Abattoirs

Q19 Michael German: What steps has Christine Gwyther taken to aid the survival of small abattoirs? (OAQ6090)

Christine Gwyther: The Government announced in September last year, as part of a series of reviews in relation to the farming industry, the establishment of a group to look at the regulatory burden on slaughterhouses. The group issued its report at the end of last year and the Government responded by way of an action plan.

The Assembly's main interest has been in the attempt to reduce the burden on small to medium abattoirs which have an important part to play in delivering our food strategy and which help to underpin the economic viability of the rural/agricultural economy. The group failed to agree on a recommendation on this issue and recommends a further review on this matter.

The Food Standards Agency, which now has responsibility for licensing and other regulatory issues in relation to slaughterhouses, set up a task force to look at meat inspection charges. One of its key tasks was to consider alternative ways of minimising costs faced by low throughput plants.

The task force has now published its report and I will be considering its recommendations carefully.

Hunting in Wales (Assembly Decision)

Q20 Christine Humphreys: Will any decision on hunting in Wales be made by the National Assembly and will Christine Gwyther make a statement? (OAQ6066)

Christine Gwyther: Not in the present circumstances. Hunting is not a devolved issue and any ban would require primary legislation. The Secretary of State for the Home Department did say that Members of Parliament could table an amendment to the proposed Bill giving the Assembly the power to implement a ban in Wales, but that would be matter for Parliament to decide. Furthermore, it should be noted that the Burns report recommended that, unless there was a good reason on objective grounds, it would be unsatisfactory to have different legislative provisions in force in different regions of England and Wales.

Implications of Burns Inquiry in Wales

Q21 Alun Cairns: What implications does the Burns inquiry have in Wales? (OAQ6098)

Christine Gwyther: I am still studying the report but one of its most notable features is the difference between upland areas, such as those in many parts of Wales, and lowland areas in England with regard to fox predation and methods of controlling their numbers. In upland areas, the Burns Committee found that fox predation on sheep and game was more prevalent and that the most effective method of controlling the fox population in these areas was by shooting.

Decision on Close Season for Canal Fishing

Q22 Lynne Neagle: Will Christine Gwyther indicate when a decision will be made on the close season for canal fishing? (OAQ6084)

Christine Gwyther: I refer you to my letter to you of 25 June. A decision will be made later in the year.

Reviewing Milk Pricing in Wales

Q23 Richard Edwards: Does Christine Gwyther have any plans to review milk pricing in Wales? (OAQ6062)

Christine Gwyther: No. The price of milk is determined by commercial considerations and the Assembly cannot intervene.

All-Wales Sea Fisheries Committee

Q24 William Graham: What efforts has Christine Gwyther made or will she make to create an all-Wales sea fisheries committee? (OAQ6095)

Christine Gwyther: Sea fisheries committees are committees of local government and their funding and management functions are matters for the constituent members of the committees. The issue of an all-Wales sea fisheries committee is therefore a matter for local authorities.

Reviewing the Bureaucratic Burden facing Farmers

Q25 Peter Black: What action has Christine Gwyther taken to review the bureaucratic burden facing farmers? (OAQ6059)

Christine Gwyther: The Government announced in September last year, a series of reviews as part of a package of aid to the farming industry. Independent groups were set up to look at three key areas where regulatory burdens were received as being particularly burdensome:

- the meat industry

- IACS (the Integrated Administration and Control System) and farm inspections
- the intervention system.

The groups all reported before Christmas and the Government responded by means of an action plan.

The most sensitive area is the meat industry. The group looked at slaughterhouse regulation and sought to identify areas where the burden might be lightened, consistent with continuing to ensure the safety of food and respecting animal health and welfare obligations. The report identified some areas where regulation could be streamlined but its scope was limited: many of these regulations derive from European legislation or from UK law enacted to protect public safety.

The Assembly's main interest has been to attempt to reduce the burden on small to medium abattoirs which have an important part in delivering our food strategy and which help to underpin the economic viability of the rural/agricultural economy. The group failed to agree on a recommendation on this issue and recommended a further review on this matter.

The Food Standards Agency, which now has responsibility for licensing and other regulatory issues relating to slaughterhouses, has set up a taskforce to look at meat inspection charges. One of its key tasks is to consider alternative ways of minimising costs faced by low throughput plants. The group has now published its report and I will be studying its recommendations carefully.

In addition to these Government reviews, I have commissioned a bilingual telephone survey of 3,000 farmers in Wales. The survey, which is styled the Welsh Farming Customer Survey 2000, began on 21 June and is inviting farmers to tell the National Assembly how they would like Common Agriculture Policy grants and subsidy payment administration improved, with the specific aim of making their lives easier. The questions put to farmers are designed to find out with which other public sector organisations the National Assembly should work in partnership to rationalise the sources of demand on farmers' time. It also asks whether services are accessible at the most useful times of day and located in the most helpful places, as well as what information farmers need to make running their businesses less burdensome. In addition, the survey is looking for ways to make claim forms easier to use and collecting data on the extent of farmers' use of IT and diversification methods. The survey results will formally record farmers' experiences and needs, using them to inform strategies for the delivery of a more customer-focused service. The results will be available in July.

Seasonal Agricultural Work (Low Pay and Lack of Job Security)

Q26 Ann Jones: What plans does Christine Gwyther have to combat low pay and lack of job security among seasonal agricultural workers in Wales? (OAQ6091)

Christine Gwyther: The Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales is responsible for negotiating and deciding on the minimum rates of pay, and terms and conditions of employment, which employers must follow if they are employing agricultural workers anywhere in England and Wales. The AWB is given powers under the Agricultural Wages Act 1948 (as amended) to make Orders which have the force of law and are enforced in Wales by the National Assembly for Wales's Agriculture Department. The current conditions applying—including those for workers engaged to undertake short periods of temporary or seasonal work either as standard or casual workers—are laid down in the Agricultural Wages Order 2000 (No. 1) which came into force on 1 June 2000.

Contribution of Agriculture to the South Wales Valleys

Q27 Janet Ryder: How does agriculture contribute to the economy, society and environment of the south Wales Valleys? (OAQ6075)

Christine Gwyther: Although the lower slopes of the south Wales Valleys are densely developed, the open hills above are an attractive, important feature adding to the contrasting character of the area. Agriculture makes a relatively minor direct contribution to the local economy, but is critical to

safeguarding the open landscape of the hills above, as well as providing employment and contributing to the social well being of Valleys communities.

Veterinary Products (High Prices)

Q28 Peter Rogers: What discussions has Christine Gwyther had with veterinary product manufacturers to discuss the high prices of veterinary products in Wales? (OAQ6156)

Christine Gwyther: I refer to my answer given to you on 8 June 2000 in response to written questions WAQ5380, WAQ5382, WAQ5383, WAQ5384 and WAQ5385. The reviews I referred to then have not yet been completed. When they are, I will consider whether discussions with the manufacturers would be useful.

Mesur Safonau Byw

C29 Elin Jones: Beth yw'r dull gorau i fesur safon byw yn y Gymru wledig? (OAQ6150)

Christine Gwyther: Mae grŵp prosiect ar y cyd gan y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol a Chymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru wedi datblygu mynegai aml-amddifadedd newydd. Bydd y mynegai hwn yn darparu data fesul adran etholiadol (ward) ledled Cymru. Ceir mynegai incwm a fydd yn rhoi ffordd wrthrychol o gymharu cyfran y bobl ar incwm isel mewn ardaloedd gwledig a threfol. Bydd y data hefyd yn darparu mynegai ar wahân ar gyfer tlodi ymhlith plant. Cyhoeddir mynegai aml-amddifadedd Cymru yn ystod yr haf eleni.

Living Standards Indicator

Q29 Elin Jones: What is the best indicator of living standards in rural Wales? (OAQ6150)

Christine Gwyther: A new index of multiple deprivation has been developed by a joint National Assembly and Welsh Local Government Association project group. This index will provide data at electoral division (ward) level throughout Wales. There is an income indicator. This indicator will provide an objective way of comparing the proportion of low incomes in rural and urban areas. A separate indicator of child poverty will also be available from these data. The Welsh index of multiple deprivation will be published this summer.

Tackling Poverty in Rural Wales

Q30 Brian Hancock: Within her responsibility as Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development, how does Christine Gwyther intend to tackle the problems of poverty in rural Wales? (OAQ6068)

Christine Gwyther: Poverty stems from a wide range of factors such as unemployment, poor health and social disadvantage. We are already taking action on a number of fronts to tackle the underlying causes of poverty in rural areas and throughout Wales as a whole.

Rural communities will directly benefit from both domestic and European programmes and initiatives such as Communities First, the new local regeneration fund, the Objective 1 and 2 programmes and the Objective 3 operational programme. Together they provide a comprehensive range of measures to help reverse economic decline, promote employment, generate wealth and combat social exclusion by targeting action on our most deprived communities. Within my own area of responsibility, the rural development plan is an important document containing specific support for the adaptation and development of rural communities to improve basic services, promote diversification and encourage alternative sources of income.

Questions to the Secretary for Education and Children

Equality of Access to Welsh Medium Education

Q3 Alun Cairns: How is the Secretary for Education and Children securing equality of access to Welsh medium education across all local education authorities? (OAQ6111)

The Secretary for Education and Children (Rosemary Butler): Local education authorities are responsible for planning and providing for the education of children in their area. They should take account of parental preferences for different types of schooling where this is compatible with the efficient use of resources. In areas where there is growing demand for Welsh medium education, I expect local education authorities to develop proposals to expand provision in their school organisation plans.

Support for Small Rural Schools

Q5 Kirsty Williams: What support is offered by the Assembly to small rural schools? (OAQ6041)

Rosemary Butler: All schools are funded through the local government revenue settlement. The effect of sparsity on the cost of providing services has been considered in the review of the formula that the Assembly uses to distribute resources to local authorities. The results, to be published on 3 July, will consider the possible use of sparsity as an indicator in calculating various elements of the formula. A decision on whether the formula should include an element for sparsity in relation to schools will be taken following consultation with local authorities and others.

Promoting the Use of ICT

Q6 David Lloyd: How will Rosemary Butler promote the use of information and communication technology in delivering the curriculum in Wales? (OAQ6133)

Rosemary Butler: The use of ICT is a cross-cutting requirement for all curriculum subjects. Opportunities for developing pupils' IT skills are clearly signposted in the new national curriculum documents, and this has been welcomed by teachers. Over the next two years, the Assembly will provide over £20 million funding for ICT equipment and training in schools to support teaching and learning and several best practice projects. We are working closely with the New Opportunities Fund on its ICT training programme for teachers and librarians.

Backlog of Repairs in School Buildings

Q7 Peter Black: What is Rosemary Butler's assessment of the backlog of repairs in school buildings in Wales? (OAQ6057)

Rosemary Butler: The Welsh Local Government Association has estimated that the backlog of repairs to school buildings is in the order of £325 million.

Developing Innovative and Robust Ideas

Q8 Jocelyn Davies: How will Rosemary Butler ensure that we develop innovative and robust ideas to meet our particular educational needs? (OAQ6110)

Rosemary Butler: We will continue to base our education policies on the best available evidence as to what makes a difference in schools. We will also maintain our commitment towards establishing a policy framework for education in Wales within which teachers will have every scope to exercise their creative and professional skills.

Analysis of Exam Statistics

Q9 Mick Bates: Will Rosemary Butler introduce a regular analysis across Wales of exam statistics with the intention of revealing good areas of practice and problem areas? (OAQ6115)

Rosemary Butler: The National Assembly already publishes annually school and local education authority digests of GCSE and GNVQ results. The National Assembly's statistical directorate supplements this information by publishing examination statistics at Wales, LEA and Assembly constituency area level. The Chief Inspector's annual report also features commentary on standards of achievement throughout Wales. This range of information, when supplemented by locally produced analyses enables schools and LEAs to identify strengths and weaknesses and put results into a local and national context.

Equal Opportunities for Teachers in Wales

Q10 Helen Mary Jones: How will Rosemary Butler ensure that teachers in Wales are given equal opportunities? (OAQ6125)

Rosemary Butler: Teachers have equality in terms of pay and conditions of service set for Wales and England. I encourage local education authorities, governors and headteachers, to operate to equal opportunity principles in all their dealings with teachers.

Collecting SAT Results

Q11 Michael German: Will Rosemary Butler introduce a policy for collecting standardised attainment test results separately for special educational needs units in those schools that have such units on site? (OAQ6040)

Rosemary Butler: The key stage 2 and 3 external marking and data collection system has been developed to minimise the administrative burden on schools and teachers. Separate collections from schools would add to the current arrangements. The Assembly does not publish the collected data on a school by school basis; that is done by the schools through their prospectuses and governors' annual reports. Schools with designated classes or units are free to publish two sets of data to help put their results into context. The first set, which applies to all schools, is for all pupils in the school and the second set is for mainstream pupils only.

Specialist Schools in Wales

Q12 Richard Edwards: Will Rosemary Butler make a brief statement about specialist schools in Wales? (OAQ6048)

Rosemary Butler: Whether or not a school wishes to develop a particular identity or expertise in technology, languages, sports, the arts or other fields, is a matter for schools to determine. We have no plans to alter this policy.

Promoting Healthy Eating Among School Children

Q13 Lynne Neagle: What plans does Rosemary Butler have to promote healthy eating among school children? (OAQ6086)

Rosemary Butler: Healthy eating should be promoted in schools as part of a holistic approach to improving health. To this end, we are encouraging all local education departments to work in partnership with their health authorities to develop health promoting school schemes which can apply to be accredited as part of the Welsh network of healthy school schemes.

Draft guidance and draft regulations on nutritional standards for school meals will be issued for consultation in the autumn.

A research project on the contribution of fruit tuck shops in improving diet is underway in south Wales and Bristol. The results will guide future policy.

With regard to the taught curriculum, food, nutrition and other health related issues figure prominently in the programmes of study for science, physical education and design and technology. They also feature in the new framework for personal and social education. The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales is producing guidance on the place of food in the school curriculum in Wales, which will draw these elements together. Guidance for primary school teachers is also available on the health promotion division website www.hpw.wales.gov.uk/schools.

Analysing Truancy and Absenteeism Figures

Q14 Peter Black: Has Rosemary Butler undertaken an analysis of truancy and absenteeism figures for Welsh schools with a view to revealing best practice? (OAQ6039)

Rosemary Butler: National Assembly circular 3/99, 'Pupil Support and Social Exclusion', includes guidance for schools and local education authorities on a range of practical measures to challenge school attendance difficulties.

'Betterwales.com' sets out the targets to improve the overall school attendance rate.

My officials will be monitoring with LEAs the effectiveness of activities to combat truancy and absenteeism and will be promoting the sharing of practices that are shown to have a positive impact on pupil attitude towards school attendance.

Proportion of Local Authority Budgets Spent on Education

Q15 Owen John Thomas: What discussions has Rosemary Butler had with local education authorities with a view to closing the gap in the proportion of local authority budgets spent on education? (OAQ6037)

Rosemary Butler: I have asked authorities to look carefully at the needs of their education service taking account of pressures, and to allocate at least their share of the £91 million additional spending for education made possible by the local government revenue settlement for 2000-01 to their education budgets.

Developing a Team Spirit within Educational Services

Q16 Janet Ryder: Will Rosemary Butler outline how her policies develop a team spirit within educational services? (OAQ6109)

Rosemary Butler: All local education authorities now have in place education strategic plans which outline their key priorities for action during the period April 1999 to March 2002. These plans are the result of close consultation between LEAs and schools, and in many instances other statutory, voluntary and local bodies which have a part to play.

Tackling the Backlog of School Repairs

Q17 Christine Humphreys: How does Rosemary Butler intend to tackle the backlog of school repairs in Wales? (OAQ6045)

Rosemary Butler: Responsibility for the repair, maintenance and provision of new school buildings in Wales rests with local authorities and governing bodies of voluntary aided schools.

Developing a Welsh Baccalaureate

Q18 Pauline Jarman: When does Rosemary Butler propose to commission a study of how a Welsh baccalaureate could be developed in Wales? (OAQ6134)

Rosemary Butler: I refer you to the answer that the First Secretary gave to David Lloyd on 20 June (OAQ5816).

Grants for Graduate Trainee Primary Teachers

Q19 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will Rosemary Butler introduce grants for graduate trainee primary teachers? (OAQ6127)

Rosemary Butler: The training and teaching grants that I announced are available for secondary subjects as initial teacher training providers have had difficulties meeting the secondary trainee intake targets for some time. There will be a review that will include the question of any impact on entry into training for primary teaching.

Monitoring Secondments from Teaching Unions to LEAs

Q20 Michael German: What regulations are in place to monitor secondments from teaching unions to local education authorities? (OAQ6128)

Rosemary Butler: This is a matter for LEAs. There are no arrangements to monitor secondments from teaching unions to LEAs.

Cabinet Policy Advisers

Q21 Jenny Randerson: Can policy advisers to the Cabinet have any role in respect of education policy? (OAQ6145)

Rosemary Butler: Yes. The First Secretary and Cabinet policy advisers are appointed to advise on the development of Assembly policy. This will include education policy.

Role of Key Skills in the National Curriculum

Q22 Richard Edwards: Will Rosemary Butler make a brief statement on the role of key skills in the national curriculum in Wales? (OAQ6046)

Rosemary Butler: Key skills are vital to the future of Wales. They play a crucial role in education, both in the statutory sector and beyond. That is why we are introducing the new key skills qualification, which will be available from September this year. Within the national curriculum, opportunities to develop key skills are highlighted within the programmes of study for each subject by the use of icons.

Increasing the Percentage of Students Taking WJEC Examinations

Q23 Brian Hancock: What plans does Rosemary Butler have to increase the percentage of students in Wales taking Welsh Joint Education Committee examinations? (OAQ6118)

Rosemary Butler: None. This is a matter for the WJEC. However, I have the highest regard for the work of the WJEC.

Attracting Teachers to Rural Wales

Q24 Peter Rogers: Will Rosemary Butler report on the need to offer financial incentives in order to attract teachers to rural Wales? (OAQ6106)

Rosemary Butler: Teachers' pay and conditions of service are the Department for Education and Employment's responsibility. From September 2000, a range of three recruitment and retention allowances will replace the existing system of recruitment and retention points. The first or second allowance can be awarded at the discretion of the relevant body to teachers in schools generally. A third allowance applies to inner London, and schools in special measures.

Reducing the Number of School Closures in Rural Areas

Q25 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Does Rosemary Butler have any plans to reduce the number of school closures in rural areas? (OAQ6120)

Rosemary Butler: Proposals for closure are a matter for local authorities. Where a statutory proposal attracts objections and comes to me for determination, I judge it on its merits. There have been few such proposals recently. I approved two proposals from Pembrokeshire local education authority to discontinue rural schools in the Preselli area. In one case the school in question is being amalgamated with another local rural school. In the other, two schools are being closed and a new local rural school is being established in the premises of one of the closed schools. In the year before the Assembly came into being there were two proposals for the closure of rural schools. In each case amalgamated rural schools were the result of the closures.

Grants for Graduate Trainee Primary Teachers

Q26 Cynog Dafis: When will Rosemary Butler introduce grants for graduate trainee primary teachers? (OAQ6126)

Rosemary Butler: The training and teaching grants that I announced are available for secondary subjects as initial teacher training providers have had difficulties meeting the secondary trainee intake targets for some time. There will be a review that will include the question of any impact on entry into training for primary teaching.

Emulating the Beacon Schools' Initiative

Q27 Ann Jones: What plans does Rosemary Butler have to emulate the beacon schools' initiative in Wales? (OAQ6130)

Rosemary Butler: Encouraging schools to learn from successful practice being applied elsewhere is a central element of our policy for raising standards in schools. Projects enabling successful schools to share critical elements of their success may be funded under the £1.5 million school improvement fund, which is part of the grants for education support and training programme.

Visiting Special Needs Schools in Rhondda Cynon Taff

Q28 Jane Davidson: Will Rosemary Butler undertake to visit special needs schools in Rhondda Cynon Taff as part of her programme, in particular Tŷ Coch and Rhondda Special School? (OAQ6034)

Rosemary Butler: I would be happy to undertake visits to these schools when suitable opportunities arise and I have asked officials to include them as part of my future programme of visits.

Reducing the Incidents of Bullying

Q29 Lynne Neagle: How can the Assembly assist schools to reduce incidents of bullying? (OAQ6085)

Rosemary Butler: Under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, head teachers are obliged to ensure that their school has in place effective measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils.

National Assembly circular 3/99 'Pupil Support and Social Inclusion', issued last September, sets out practical guidance on promoting good pupil behaviour and discipline, including advice on effective anti-bullying strategies. A copy of the circular has been placed in the Library.

Percentage of GCSE Students who sat WJEC Examinations Last Year

Q30 Brian Hancock: What percentage of GCSE students in Wales sat Welsh Joint Education Committee examinations last year compared to five years ago? (OAQ6119)

Rosemary Butler: The information requested is not collected centrally.