

## Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 13 June 2002

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

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

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### Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

#### Ysgolion (Cynllunio'n Ariannol)

**C1 Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar sut mae sicrhau bod ysgolion Cymru yn gallu cynllunio'n ariannol yn effeithiol o flwyddyn i flwyddyn? (OAQ18289) [W] *Trosglwyddwyd ar gyfer ateb ysgrifenedig.*

**Y Gweinidog dros Addysg a Dysgu Gydol Oes (Jane Davidson):** Mae rhai awdurdodau lleol yn arddel arfer da ar hyn o bryd, drwy ddarparu cyllidebau dangosol i'w hysgolion hyd at dair blynedd o flaen llaw. Hoffwn weld hyn yn dod yn arfer cyffredin. Bydd y Mesur Addysg, sydd gerbron y Senedd ar hyn o bryd, yn ei gwneud yn ofynnol i awdurdodau lleol sefydlu fforymau lleol er mwyn trafod materion cyllidebol ag ysgolion. Y math hwn o ddeialog strwythuredig yw'r ffordd gywir o ddelio ag angen ysgolion i gynllunio ymlaen llaw.

#### Schools (Planning Finances)

**Q1 Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Will the Minister make a statement on how to ensure that Welsh schools are able to plan their finances effectively from year to year? (OAQ18289) [W] *Transferred for written answer.*

**The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson):** Good practice exists in some local authorities, which provide their schools with indicative budgets for up to three years ahead. I want to see that this become the norm. The Education Bill currently before Parliament will require local authorities to set up local forums to discuss budgetary issues with schools. That sort of structured dialogue is the right way to address the need of schools to plan ahead.

#### Fruit Tuck Shops in Schools

**Q9 Mick Bates:** How many schools in Wales have fruit tuck shops? (OAQ18304)

**Jane Davidson:** Currently, 253 fruit tuck shops are being set up in schools that are part of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes.

*Question 10 (OAQ18310) withdrawn.*

#### Work-Life Balance Initiative (Pilot)

**Q11 Val Lloyd:** Will the Minister make a statement about the pilot work-life balance initiative in Wales? (OAQ18311)

**Jane Davidson:** The Welsh Assembly Government is undertaking several measures as part of its campaign to promote better work-life balance in Wales. Last month, I was delighted to announce details of one of our key measures: developing good-practice pilots in the public sector. The Assembly Government will fund these for three years and Chwarae Teg will manage the projects. The successful bodies comprise three local authorities (Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Wrexham), two Assembly sponsored public bodies (Education and Learning Wales and the Countryside Council for Wales) and two universities (Cardiff and Trinity College, Carmarthen). These bodies provide a good range of functions, size and geographical spread, and I hope that the lessons learned from the pilots will be applicable across the entire public sector in Wales.

### **Faith Schools**

**Q12 Brian Gibbons:** What proportion of primary school children in Wales attend faith schools? (OAQ18300)

**Jane Davidson:** Latest available figures (January 2001) show that 13 per cent of primary school pupils (36,456 out of 285,786) attend maintained schools designated as having a religious character.

### **Late Payments to Schools (Teachers' Upper Pay Spine)**

**Q13 Helen Mary Jones:** What representations has the Minister received from teaching unions regarding late payments to schools to fund the cost of teachers entering the upper pay spine? (OAQ18287)

**Jane Davidson:** Many people have raised concerns about the funding for teachers' pay. I promised in my statement on 2 May that we would consider the hard evidence on local authorities' provision for schools. As a result, we have concluded that, in the light of identified pressures, a further £18.7 million should be made available to local education authorities for 2002-03 as a special grant.

The evidence shows that this additional funding should enable schools to meet all the pressures arising this year from the new pay arrangements, and ensure that they do not need to hold staff back from progressing under the new arrangements simply for financial reasons. We have decided that all the necessary funds should be provided immediately, and a special grant report will be put before the Assembly for Members' approval before the end of the session.

### **Recruitment and Retention in the HE Sector**

**Q14 Ieuan Wyn Jones:** What further investigation is planned to address the recruitment and retention difficulties in the higher education sector in Wales? (OAQ18295)

**Jane Davidson:** Higher education institutions are autonomous bodies, with responsibility for their own management, including staff pay and conditions of employment. The Assembly has no powers to intervene. However, the Assembly does expect institutions to follow public-sector pay policy and reflect the principle of fairness, and the need to recruit, motivate and retain staff within the limits set by the HE funding settlement. In addition, higher education institutions are under statutory obligation to pay staff equal pay for equal work. In 2001-02, we made an additional £3 million available to the sector to meet pressures, including the retention and recruitment of staff. We have allocated a further £6 million in the current financial year.

The higher education strategy 'Reaching Higher' emphasises the importance of the recruitment and retention of students, particularly in the context of widening access. The latest figures available from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service show that applications for undergraduate courses for academic year 2002-03 are up by 5.1 per cent in Wales, compared to the equivalent figures for the academic year 2001-02. That is higher than in England, Scotland, or Northern Ireland.

The latest performance indicators show that Wales is also outperforming other parts of the UK in terms of student retention. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has been given a remit to encourage all HE institutions to consider retention strategies, echoing the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to the widening access agenda.

### **Pay and Conditions for Lecturing Staff**

**Q15 Pauline Jarman:** Will the Minister make a statement on the pay and conditions of lecturing staff in Wales during the last year? (OAQ18285)

**Jane Davidson:** Higher education institutions are autonomous bodies with responsibility for their own management, including the pay and conditions of all grades of staff. The Assembly has no powers to intervene. However, the Assembly does expect institutions to follow public sector pay policy and reflect the principle of fairness, and the need to recruit, motivate and retain staff within the limits set by the HE funding settlement. In addition, higher education institutions are under statutory obligation to pay staff equal pay for equal work. In 2001-02, we made an additional £3 million available to the sector to meet pressures, including the retention and recruitment of staff. We have allocated a further £6 million in the current financial year.

### **Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services**

#### **National Strategy for Arthritis Care in Wales**

**Q8 Owen John Thomas:** Will the Minister undertake to introduce a national strategy for arthritis care in Wales? (OAQ18276)

**The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt):** I am aware of the support for this, which was voiced at the recent launch of the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society in Wales. I have asked my officials to consider these proposals and report back to me.

#### **Increasing the NHS Workforce**

**Q9 Val Lloyd:** What steps has the Minister taken to continue increasing the workforce in the national health service in Wales? (OAQ18256)

**Jane Hutt:** Since 1997, the whole-time equivalent number of directly employed NHS staff has increased by 8 per cent. Consultants' numbers have increased by 24 per cent and nursing staff by 6 per cent. We plan to extend the nursing return-to-practice scheme to other professions. Our national recruitment and retention strategy will address the issue of shortage professions.

#### **Gulf War Syndrome**

**Q10 Owen John Thomas:** What plans does the Minister have to aid sufferers of Gulf war syndrome? (OAQ18275)

**Jane Hutt:** Some Gulf war veterans have become ill and many believe that that ill-health is unusual and is related to their experience in the Gulf war. There is now evidence that Gulf war veterans report more ill-health than other comparable groups, but there is no medical or scientific consensus about the causes of the illnesses.

The Ministry of Defence has lead responsibility for issues surrounding Gulf war veterans' illnesses. The subject remains a high priority, as evidenced by the Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme, and ongoing support for research.

All Gulf war veterans have access to medical advice from the Ministry of Defence's Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme, and I encourage Gulf war veterans who are concerned about their health to attend the programme.

### **Rheumatoid Arthritis Strategy**

**Q11 Kirsty Williams:** Will the Minister make a statement on a strategy for rheumatoid arthritis in Wales? (OAQ18324)

**Jane Hutt:** I am aware of the support for such a strategy, which was expressed at the recent launch of the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society in Wales. I am grateful to you for sponsoring that launch. Officials and I need to consider carefully whether the production of a strategy is the best way forward or whether we can improve arthritis services in Wales in other ways. If we decide to develop a strategy, I need to consider whether we should concentrate solely on rheumatoid arthritis or whether it would be advisable to include all forms of arthritis. I welcome the renewed links with the arthritis voluntary sector, and I shall keep in close touch with its views as we decide on the best approach.

### **NHS Dentists in Mid Wales**

**Q12 Mick Bates:** Will the Minister make a statement on the recruitment of NHS dentists in mid Wales? (OAQ18317)

**Jane Hutt:** It remains the responsibility of Welsh health authorities to ensure that access to NHS dental treatment is available to patients who wish to use it. I will continue to help them to achieve this target through the Welsh dental initiative, which has been successful in attracting new dentists to those parts of Wales where they were most needed.

### **Podiatry Services in Wales**

**Q13 David Lloyd:** Will the Minister make a statement on the development of podiatry services in Wales? (OAQ18342) [R]

**Jane Hutt:** The provision of all health services, including podiatry, is at present the responsibility of local 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 to meet that need within the resources available. These are not easy decisions to make, but the authorities, with their local knowledge, are best placed to prioritise the services that people need.

In support, we are currently commissioning 28 training places per year on the BSc (Hons) Podiatry course at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff. That number has remained constant since we first took over responsibility for commissioning podiatry training in 1998.

### **Latest Waiting List Figures for Wales**

**Q14 David Melding:** Will the Minister make a statement on the latest waiting list figures for Wales? (OAQ18260)

**Jane Hutt:** The cardiac target has been achieved; at 1 April 2002, no-one in Wales had been waiting in excess of 12 months for cardiac surgery. The figures for the target area of orthopaedics continue to fall. Since July last year, the number of people waiting over four months for cataract surgery has been cut by nearly 60 per cent.

### **Pain Relieving Drugs**

**Q15 Jocelyn Davies:** How is the Minister ensuring greater accessibility to new pain relieving drugs?  
(OAQ18345)

**Jane Hutt:** I am not sure what drugs you have in mind. All drugs are available to be prescribed on the NHS, provided that they have the appropriate marketing authorisation and are not listed under part XVIII A of the drug tariff. The choice of drug to be prescribed is then a matter for clinical judgment.