

## **Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 12 February 2003**

[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 Health and Social Services**

### **Hospital Admissions (Gwent)**

**Q8 David Davies:** Will the Minister make a statement on the situation regarding admissions to hospitals in the Gwent area? (OAQ22440)

**The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt):** As is often the case at this time of year, the hospitals in Gwent are under considerable pressure from high levels of admissions. A new emergency physician started work in January at the Royal Gwent Hospital and an emergency assessment unit is opening in September with a further second consultant physician appointment.

### **Broadband in the NHS in Wales**

**Q9 Delyth Evans:** What progress is being made in the introduction of broadband in the national health service in Wales? (OAQ22342)

**Jane Hutt:** The introduction of broadband network technology is a fundamental part of NHS Wales's Telecommunications 2000 strategy. A migration programme has been underway since April 2001 to implement this strategy and to introduce broadband networking into NHS Wales's networks.

As of September 2001, NHS Wales's core data network was totally replaced with broadband technology, and May 2002 saw all NHS trusts in Wales successfully incorporating the same broadband technology into their local networks.

In parallel, another programme has been dealing with modernising all information and communications technology in GP practices. As part of this initiative, every GP practice in Wales is being provided with a broadband connection to the new corporate network service. To date, 75 per cent of GP practices in Wales are connected.

### **Dentistry Services**

**Q10 Owen John Thomas:** What steps is the Minister taking to improve the provision of dentistry services, given that 46 per cent of the population of the Bro Taf Health Authority area is not registered with an NHS dentist? (OAQ22344)

**Jane Hutt:** As a direct result of the incentives offered through stage 3 of the Welsh dental initiative announced last March, new or expanded NHS practices have been opened in Merthyr Tydfil and Treorchy, and agreement in principle has been reached for a practice to be expanded in Fairwater, Cardiff.

Additionally, the Bro Taf Health Authority area has been granted £224,000 over two years to purchase additional access sessions for those patients unable or unwilling to register with an NHS dentist for continuing care.

*Question 11 (OAQ22340) is withdrawn.*

### **National Health Service Waiting Lists**

**Q12 Alun Cairns:** Would the Minister make a statement on national health service waiting lists? (OAQ22430)

**Jane Hutt:** Since the waiting times strategy was announced, significant investment has been made in reducing waiting times and modernising the way they are managed and services delivered. We have seen improvements in our priority target areas over the latest quarter with reductions in:

- the number of patients waiting over 18 months for orthopaedic treatment and over four months for cataract surgery;
- cardiac surgery, where the service has achieved and maintained the important target that no patient waits longer than 12 months, and is on schedule to ensure that, from the end of March 2003, no patient should have to wait for longer than six months for their angiography investigation;
- the number of people in orthopaedics waiting for longer than 18 months. This has reduced by 1,700 in the last 12 months. Nearly all trusts in Wales, including Gwent, met the key target of ensuring that no one would wait longer than 18 months for inpatient or day case treatment by the end of July 2002 and they continue to work hard to sustain this position.
- the number of people waiting for an initial outpatient appointment and in those waiting over 18 months.

### **Health Services in Swansea**

**Q13 Peter Black:** What additional capital investment has been made in health services in Swansea since September 2000? (OAQ22452)

**Jane Hutt:** Since 2000, spending within the Swansea NHS Trust area (year on year) has been £5,370 million (2000-01), £13.873 million (2001-02), £24,803 million (2002-03 to date) making for a total of £44,046 million. These figures are made up from all-Wales funding, internally generated funds, other schemes and discretionary capital.

### **Orthopaedic Services in Gwent**

**Q14 John Griffiths:** Will the Minister make a statement on Professor Brian Edwards's report on orthopaedic services in Gwent? (OAQ22449)

**Jane Hutt:** Please refer to the answer I gave to Kirsty Williams's question (OAQ22461) on 12 February:

The review identified some important themes that apply across Wales. The report's recommendations are being discussed by my officials and the Gwent health community. I will announce the way forward on 26 February at the Health and Social Service Committee meeting.

*Question 15 (OAQ22458) is withdrawn.*

## Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

### School Buildings

**Q5 Janet Davies:** Will the Minister make a statement on the progress towards ensuring that all school buildings are fit for purpose by 2010? (OAQ22421) *Transferred for written answer.*

**The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson):** I refer you to the statement that I made in Plenary on 5 February.

*Question 6 (OAQ22372) was answered with question 1 (OAQ22373) in Plenary.*

### School Federations

**Q7 Kirsty Williams:** Can the Minister say how many school federations have occurred since the implementation of special grant no. 6? (OAQ22467)

**Jane Davidson:** None since 30 April 2002, when special grant no. 6 was approved. Federation generally involves the replacement of two or more schools with a new federated school under one headteacher and one governing body, which operates on the sites of some or all of the schools it replaces. Such a reorganisation requires statutory procedures. These include full local consultation and take around a year to complete. Guidance circular 23/02 makes it clear that federation is an option that should always be considered in light of local circumstances.

### Students from Disadvantaged Communities

**Q8 Val Lloyd:** Would the Minister make a statement about the recruitment of students from disadvantaged communities into higher education in Wales? (OAQ22371)

**Jane Davidson:** Widening access is a key priority in 'Reaching Higher' and this is an area where Welsh institutions are leading the way. In 2000-01, 15 per cent of young full-time entrants to Welsh higher education institutions were from low participation neighbourhoods, compared to 12.5 per cent for the UK. I look to institutions to build on this record and am pleased that the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has allocated the additional £2 million for widening access to four partnerships across Wales.

### Llanelli—the Learning Town Pilot

**Q9 Delyth Evans:** Can the Minister give an update on the Llanelli—the Learning Town pilot? (OAQ22362)

**Jane Davidson:** The purpose of this pilot is to assess the extent to which the provision of free learning increases the demand for training and improves levels of skills and qualifications amongst those in employment. The project has been enthusiastically received in the area since its launch last September and the National Council—ELWa expects 800 workers to have signed-up for learning by the end of March.

### Classroom Assistants

**Q10 Gareth Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on plans to train greater numbers of classroom assistants as a means of improving conditions of service for teachers in Wales? (OAQ22377)

**Jane Davidson:** More support for teachers in the classroom will be an important part of delivering contractual changes to reduce teachers' workload. That support will need to be appropriately trained and

qualified. We will be working with our education partners to develop the way forward in Wales and, in particular, how we can best build on the skills of existing support staff.

### **School Fruit Tuck Shops**

**Q11 Kirsty Williams:** Can the Minister make a statement on the progress of the school fruit tuck shops initiatives? (OAQ22468)

**Jane Davidson:** Two hundred and seventy two fruit tuck shops have been set up on a cost-recovery basis within schools participating in local healthy school schemes. Supportive materials to encourage further participation have been provided and are being distributed through local networks.

### **Teaching Job Shares**

**Q12 Mick Bates:** How many teaching job shares exist in Wales? (OAQ22469)

**Jane Davidson:** Information on the number of teaching posts where jobs are shared is not held centrally. I would, however, like to see schools take a positive attitude to job sharing. It allows more people to remain active in the profession than they would otherwise and have benefits in the classroom.

### **Policy on Student Finance**

**Q13 Peter Black:** What additional resources is the Minister anticipating drawing down from the UK Government in the next three years to fund the Welsh Assembly Government's policy on student finance? (OAQ22427)

**Jane Davidson:** My officials are in detailed discussion with Whitehall colleagues regarding the proposals which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills outlined in his White Paper on higher education on 22 January and the implications of devolving responsibility for student support to the Assembly. I cannot give a clear indication of the financial implications until those discussions have been fully concluded.

### **'Schools in Wales: General Statistics 2002'**

**Q14 Pauline Jarman:** Will the Minister make a statement on the trends in participation of 16 to 18-year-olds in education and training, as revealed in 'Schools in Wales: General Statistics 2002'? (OAQ22386)

**Jane Davidson:** The number of 16 to 18-year-olds undertaking education and training in Wales remained broadly constant during the academic years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. The figures for this period report that approximately 75 per cent of this age group were in education or government-supported training. It is also encouraging to note that, during this period, there was a small increase in the numbers undertaking full-time education.

### **Funding Higher Education Institutions**

**Q15 Phil Williams:** Will the Minister make a statement on the future funding of higher education institutions in Wales? (OAQ22381)

**Jane Davidson:** This Government's funding plans for the next three years were set out in the budget, published on 15 October 2002. These plans represent a significant increase in investment in higher education, with an increase of 20 per cent over the three-year period.