

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 17 January 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

Small Welsh Schools

Q6 Mick Bates: What is the definition of a small Welsh school? (OAQ15002)

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): The Welsh Assembly Government has not adopted a definition of a small school. Where it is necessary for statistical purposes to define a small school, we tend to refer either to primary schools of 50 pupils or fewer (14 per cent of primary schools in Wales are in this category); or we use the Audit Commission definition of a small school, which is fewer than 90 pupils on roll for primary schools, fewer than 600 pupils on roll for the 11 to 16 age group secondary schools and fewer than 700 pupils on roll for secondary schools with a sixth form.

The Provision of Healthy Food in State Schools

Q7 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement on the progress made in the provision of healthy food in state schools in Wales? (OAQ14924)

Jane Davidson: We are determined to maintain and improve the health of our young people. We are pursuing this through the introduction of minimum nutritional standards for school meals and initiatives such as the Welsh network of healthy school schemes, the heartbeat award for schools and a fruit tuck shop scheme. The Welsh Assembly Government also runs a scheme providing milk free of charge to all pupils at Key Stage 1.

Addressing Violence Against School Staff Members

Q8 Jonathan Morgan: What measures is the Minister taking to address violence in the workplace against school staff members? (OAQ14902)

Jane Davidson: Violence against staff in schools, whether from pupils, parents or others, is clearly unacceptable. Guidance on how to respond to violent incidents on school premises is already in place and teachers are able to use reasonable force to restrain pupils in certain situations, including preventing them from causing personal injury. I believe that we must also give priority to measures aimed at preventing problems from arising in the first place.

Identifying and Encouraging Gifted Pupils

Q9 Nick Bourne: How does the Minister intend to help schools identify and encourage gifted pupils? (OAQ14905)

Jane Davidson: The Welsh Assembly Government aims to remove barriers that prevent children getting the education they deserve. The paving document, 'The Learning Country' exhorts schools to take account of all children's needs, 'whatever their gifts and talents'.

I have asked that ACCAC develops proposals on best practice guidance in the area of identifying gifted and talented children and providing the effective education necessary for them to reach their full potential.

Performance Pay Thresholds

Q10 Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister make a statement on how the money that has been put into the budget to finance teachers going through performance pay thresholds this year compares to last year? (OAQ15013)

Jane Davidson: The Welsh Assembly Government made a commitment to fully fund the costs of teachers' threshold pay arrangements for 2000-01 and 2001-02. A sum of £13.7 million was identified in the local government revenue settlement for 2000-01 and £26.545 million in 2001-02 with a further special grant element of £2.47 million. This is to cover pay and related costs (national insurance/pension contributions) for teachers who successfully pass the threshold assessment. This funding was based on assumptions about the numbers of teachers who would apply and be successful, but we said that, if any authority found that its share of either the £13.7 million or £29.015 million was inadequate, it would receive additional funding.

Authorities have recently been asked to submit claims in respect of any shortfall for 2000-01 and a special grant report will be put to Plenary before the end of this financial year. A similar exercise will be carried out in respect of 2001-02.

Reducing Infant Class Sizes

Q11 Karen Sinclair: Will the Minister report on recent progress in reducing infant class sizes? (OAQ14907)

Jane Davidson: Statistics published by the Assembly in November 2001 show that only 75 infant classes in Wales (1.7 per cent) had over 30 pupils in September 2001, compared with 143 (3.3 per cent) in September 2000 and 927 (24 per cent) in 1998.

Most of the classes with more than 30 pupils in September 2001 contained one or two pupils who had been admitted as permitted temporary exceptions, as allowed by law. All such classes must be arranged so that they contain no more than 30 pupils by the beginning of the next school year. In addition, action has been taken on all 20 classes that were reported in September as exceeding 30 pupils without a valid legal reason. They are all now within the statutory limit.

Protecting Teaching Staff Against Violent Attacks

Q12 David Davies: How does the Minister intend to ensure that teaching staff is protected from violent attacks? (OAQ14895)

Jane Davidson: I refer you to the answer that I gave to OAQ14902.

Pupils with Severe Language Learning Disabilities

Q13 David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of special needs education for pupils with severe language learning disabilities? (OAQ14900) [R]

Jane Davidson: A therapy working group was established to consider how LEAs and health authorities might strengthen collaborative working and develop innovative approaches to the provision of speech and language therapy. Officials are considering its recommendations.

From 2002-03, additional money is available through GEST to train teachers and learning support assistants to support speech and language provision in schools.

Individual Learning Accounts

Q14 Pauline Jarman: What provisions have been made to minimise the impact of the discontinuation of individual learning accounts on learners in Wales? (OAQ15012)

Jane Davidson: Individuals currently involved in learning or to whom a commitment has been made about a start date for learning will have their ILA funding honoured, and those who have part used their ILA will be given the opportunity to use the remainder of their account. I have asked the National Council for Education and Training for Wales to introduce a successor programme, building on the strengths of the ILA scheme, as soon as possible. The learndirect helpline provides advice on funding sources and on a range of programmes offering support mechanisms including youth and adult training, career development loans and New Deal opportunities. Student support officers both at further and higher education institutions can advise on the availability of access and hardship funding, for which the Assembly made a significantly increased provision this year.

The Impact of the New Opportunities Fund on Schools' Sports Facilities

Q15 Christine Chapman: Will the Minister report on the likely impact of the new opportunities fund on sports facilities in schools in Wales? (OAQ14908)

Jane Davidson: The £48 million made available by the new opportunities fund will be used to bring about a step change in sports facilities in schools in Wales. The programme will support projects designed to refurbish existing, and build new, indoor and outdoor sports facilities for school and wider community use. The programme will complement the action being taken by the Welsh Assembly Government to address the recommendations of the PE and school sport taskforce.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Dental Provision in Mid and West Wales

Q9 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement about dental provision in mid and west Wales? (OAQ14937)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): I am committed to ensuring that a comprehensive, high quality NHS dental service is available to all who wish to use it no matter where they live in Wales, and I will continue to work with the Welsh health authorities to ensure the availability of that service.

The Welsh dental initiative, first launched in 1995, has already had considerable success attracting new dentists into those parts of Wales where they were most needed. To build on that success, I have made additional funding available for the initiative to be continued and enhanced, and I will be making an announcement on stage three of the initiative shortly.

Waiting Times for Heroin Treatments

Q10 Peter Black: What action is the Minister taking to reduce the waiting times for heroin treatments in Wales? (OAQ14944)

Jane Hutt: Treatment is a key priority of the Welsh strategy for tackling substance misuse. However, I am concerned about the waiting times for treatment, which is why I decided to increase the drug and alcohol treatment fund to £2 million for this financial year and to further increase it in 2003-04 to nearly £3 million.

Implementing the Proposals in ‘Improving Health in Wales’

Q11 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the Minister make a brief statement on the timescale for implementing the proposals of ‘Improving Health in Wales: A Plan for the NHS with its Partners’? (OAQ14957)

Jane Hutt: The main structural reforms will be completed by April 2003 when health authorities will be abolished and their responsibilities formally transfer into the new structure. A local health board and partnership team is being established to assist the director of NHS Wales in designing, overseeing, implementing and monitoring the structural change management process. A project plan for implementing the structural reforms will be available next month. This will set out work within the main areas of:

- Human resources
- Systems, policies and processes
- Transitional management
- Development of partnerships and commissioning arrangements and Specialised Health Service Commission for Wales
- Redistribution of health authority functions
- Redesign of the professional advisory services
- Evaluation of current and future systems
- Costing the new structures

Work on implementing the full range of undertakings in ‘Improving Health in Wales—the Future of Primary Care’ is progressing and its timescale and key milestones will be contained in an implementation programme, which will be available shortly. I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Assembly Libraries.

Improving Cancer Services in North Wales

Q12 Eleanor Burnham: What plans does the Minister have to improve cancer services in the north Wales region? (OAQ14939)

Jane Hutt: Clinical networks for cancer care are the answer to the challenge of planning and delivering high quality cancer services across Wales. In the light of the commitment contained in ‘Improving Health in Wales’, three cancer networks have now been set up, one of which covers north Wales. These networks will drive forward the development of cancer services through the implementation of minimum standards and clinical guidelines to improve outcomes for patients.

Developing the Community Hospital Network

Q13 Peter Law: What action is the Minister taking to develop the community hospital network throughout Wales? (OAQ14945)

Jane Hutt: Policy on the role and future of community hospitals was issued in 1996 in the report ‘Community Hospitals in Wales—the Future’. The report advised purchasers and providers on the potential of community hospitals.

That guidance recognised the need for smaller, local hospitals to provide a range of services based on local need. The key message was that each community hospital should have a clear, locally agreed role, with the facilities and skill of the staff reflecting that role.

Local health groups, NHS Trusts and other key stakeholders are responsible for considering and agreeing the role of their community hospitals as part of delivering the wider health agenda. If these stakeholders consider that local services would be enhanced by expanding, adapting or changing the role of their community hospital, then they are free to do so, subject to all the usual consultation requirements and the provisions of the 1996 guidance mentioned above. Proposals for new hospitals would need to be processed through the usual planning mechanism.

Improving Palliative Care Services

Q14 Mick Bates: What steps is the Minister taking to improve palliative care services in Wales? (OAQ14998)

Jane Hutt: The provision of palliative care services is currently the responsibility of the health authorities. Guidance issued to the health authorities states that everyone in Wales should have access to an equally high standard of palliative care and that the NHS and the voluntary hospice movement should work together to ensure that this is achieved. Ultimately, the health authorities must determine the pattern of services, bearing in mind that palliative care may be provided in a variety of settings, including at home, in a nursing home or in hospital, as well as in a hospice.

Officials are in the process of developing a palliative care strategy for Wales. The strategy will draw on the report on palliative care services commissioned by the Welsh Medical Committee last year. The Wales Association for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care, as well as a number of leading health professionals in the field of palliative care, are also involved in the development of the strategy.

Improving Health in the Valleys

Q15 Geraint Davies: Will the Minister make a brief statement on how she intends to improve the health of the Valleys population? (OAQ14994)

Jane Hutt: We recognise the factors that affect people's health and our policies address these for people in the Valleys and in other parts of Wales. 'Improving Health in Wales' means that the NHS is playing a major role in partnership with others while our national health promotion strategy has led to a co-ordinated programme of national and local action involving the NHS, local government, schools, employers and voluntary organisations. The inequalities in health fund is supporting new action in the Valleys, while programmes such as Communities First and Objective 1 also address the social and economic factors that affect health.

Questions to the House Committee

Ailddechrau Gwaith ar y Siambr Newydd

C1 Owen John Thomas: All y Pwyllgor roi adroddiad ar y datblygiadau diweddaraf o ran penderfynu ar y dyddiad ar gyfer ailddechrau gwaith ar y Siambr newydd? (OAQ14928) [W] *Trosglwyddwyd ar gyfer ateb ysgrifenedig.*

Y Dirprwy Lywydd (John Marek): Nid yw Pwyllgor y Tŷ yn rhan o'r broses dendro ac felly nid oes ganddo unrhyw wybodaeth am y datblygiadau diweddaraf o ran ail-ddechrau'r gwaith ar y Siambr newydd. Hwyrach yr hoffech ailgyfeirio'ch cwestiwn at y Gweinidog dros Gyllid, Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau.

Restarting Work on the New Chamber

Q1 Owen John Thomas: Will the Committee give a report on the latest developments in deciding on the date for restarting work on the new Chamber? (OAQ14928) [W] *Transferred for written answer.*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Marek): The House Committee is not involved in the tendering process and therefore has no knowledge of latest developments on re-starting work on the new Chamber. You may wish to re-direct your question to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities.

Recycling Cans and Glass

Q2 Peter Black: What action is being taken to increase the number of receptacles for the recycling of cans and glass around Crickhowell House? (OAQ14926) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: At present we do not have any receptacles for recycling glass inside the building because of the associated potential health and safety risks. We have considered establishing a collection point in the car park, but it is doubtful that such an external facility would have significant use.

We are, however, continuing to explore with the waste disposal contractor the possibility of separating glass waste from the general material that is collected from us. We are also looking at ways in which it may be possible to increase the amount of recycling of cardboard waste.

With regard to the recycling of cans, there are already two receptacles in the restaurant area. There are difficulties associated with them, however. For example, despite our best efforts, people continue to put non-aluminium waste in the bins and this has to be separated out before the contractor will take it away. I will ask for work to be done to identify the practicality and to cost options for having additional receptacles sited elsewhere in the building.

More generally, the Presiding Office has established procedures for recycling other materials including paper and newspapers, toner cartridges, Christmas cards and Christmas trees with the result that over the last year we have reduced the amount of waste sent to landfill by some 66,000 litres per month.

Adopting a Corporate Logo

Q3 Peter Black: What progress is being made towards adopting a corporate logo for the National Assembly for Wales? (OAQ14927) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The arts sub-group of the House Committee and subsequently the House Committee itself has endeavoured to move forward on this matter. There has been widespread consultation with Members and discussions with the Presiding Officer in relation to the original designs submitted by VW Design, subsequent designs submitted by them and an alternative design submitted by the internal cartographics unit. The latter was considered to be symbolic of a Celtic past rather than a future Wales. It was generally agreed that the logo should be a graphical representation of a dragon but that the initial dragon design submitted by VW Design conveyed an aggressive image, which was deemed unsuitable.

We are now in a position to invite VW Design and the internal cartographics unit to develop a logo based on a dragon.

Gwerthu Nwyddau yng Nglanfa'r Cynulliad

C4 Owen John Thomas: Pa mor llwyddiannus y mae'r fenter o werthu nwyddau wedi bod yng Nglanfa'r Cynulliad? (OAQ15019) [W] *Trosglwyddwyd ar gyfer ateb ysgrifenedig.*

Y Dirprwy Lywydd: Agorodd y siop yn y Lanfa ddydd Mawrth 27 Tachwedd 2001, i Aelodau'r Cynulliad, staff y Cynulliad, grwpiau addysgiadol, ymwelwyr tramor ac aelodau'r cyhoedd.

Hyd yn hyn, ers 27 Tachwedd 2001, mae'r Cynulliad yn y Lanfa wedi croesawu 1,026 o ymwelwyr drwy'r drws. O'r cyfanswm hwn, prynodd 297 o ymwelwyr nwyddau, sy'n golygu bod bron 30 y cant o'r ymwelwyr wedi prynu nwyddau o siop y Cynulliad yn y Lanfa. Gwariwyd £2,647.02 yn y siop sy'n gyfystyr â £8.91 y cwsmer ar gyfartaledd.

Mae adborth y cwsmeriaid, yn nhermau ystod, ansawdd a'r modd yr arddangoswyd y nwyddau, wedi bod yn gadarnhaol iawn. Er mwyn gwneud y gorau o'r cyfleoedd gwerthu, mae'r nwyddau hefyd ar gael o siop y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol ar y fewnwyd.

Ychydig iawn o waith hyrwyddo allanol a wnaethpwyd adeg agor y siop, felly mae ffigurau gwerthiant siop y Cynulliad yn ddibynnol ar y nifer o bobl sy'n ymweld â'r Cynulliad yn y Lanfa. Rhaid cofio ein bod ar hyn o bryd yn y tymor llai prysur, ar adeg pan fo'r niferoedd sy'n ymweld â Bae Caerdydd yn disgyn yn aruthrol. Yn ogystal, nid oes arwydd wedi ei osod o flaen adeilad y Cynulliad yn y Lanfa hyd yn hyn.

The Sale of Products in the Pierhead Building

Q4 Owen John Thomas: How successful has the sale of products been in the Pierhead building? (OAQ15019) [W] *Transferred for written answer.*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The Assembly shop at the Pierhead opened to Assembly Members, Assembly staff, educational groups, overseas visitors and members of the public on Tuesday 27 November 2001.

To date, since Tuesday 27 November 2001, the Assembly at the Pierhead has welcomed 1,026 visitors through its doors. From this total figure, 297 visitors have made a purchase, which means that almost 30 per cent of visitors have purchased a souvenir from the Assembly shop at the Pierhead. The total sales figure is £2,647.02, which equates to an average customer spend of £8.91.

Customer feedback, in terms of product range, quality and display, is very positive. To maximise sales opportunities, products are also on sale on the National Assembly's intranet shop.

The Assembly shop opened with little external promotion so its sales figures are highly dependent on the number of people that visit the Assembly at the Pierhead. It must be remembered that we are currently in the off-peak visitor season, during which time Cardiff Bay receives a great reduction in its visitor figures. In addition, a promotional sign has yet to be sited outside the Assembly at the Pierhead.