

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 11 July 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

White Boards

Q7 Rosemary Butler: Can the Minister report the progress on implementing 'white boards' in school classrooms? (OAQ18880)

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): All schools in Wales have now received whiteboard or other multimedia equipment funded by the Assembly's 'Cymru Ar-lein' strategy. We are also currently working on arrangements to provide additional technical support and training posts to support the roll-out of the broadband network for lifelong learning. This will include funding for training to enhance teachers' use of whiteboards.

Schools Building Upgrade Budget

Q8 Kirsty Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on the schools building upgrade budget? (OAQ18908)

Jane Davidson: There is a sustained growth in provision allowing authorities to plan ahead, and work towards the 'Betterwales.com' target that, by 2010, all schools should be in good physical shape and properly maintained.

Children with Emotional, Behavioural and Other Difficulties

Q9 Pauline Jarman: Will the Minister make a statement on the support being offered to children in Welsh schools with emotional, behavioural and other difficulties? (OAQ18920)

Jane Davidson: I have made £10.86 million available under the grants for education support and training programme this year for 'tackling social disadvantage'. This includes activities to address school attendance and behaviour and support for the education social work service. Emotional and behavioural difficulties can also be assessed and supported as a special educational need.

Support for Looked-after Children

Q10 David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on the educational support given to looked-after children entering further and higher education? (OAQ18881)

Jane Davidson: The responsibilities of corporate parents are particularly important at this critical transition period to post 16 education. It is they who in many instances would need to continue to guide and support such individuals in entering further and higher education.

To facilitate such entry, the Assembly provides a safety net in the form of access and hardship funds for those who are in financial difficulties and who might otherwise not be able to take up their courses because of financial reasons. In its current guidance, the Assembly makes it clear that one of the priorities for support to eligible students should be those who have been in care. Also, for courses starting in September 2002, those who are 18 years old and over will be able to apply for the Assembly's learning grant, which will provide guaranteed support to eligible students.

Question 11 (OAQ18867) withdrawn.

Welsh-medium Education

Q12 Owen John Thomas: What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that education authorities implement undertakings on the future provision of Welsh-medium education, as stated in their statutory Welsh education schemes? (OAQ18862)

Jane Davidson: Responsibility for identifying any need for additional places in Welsh-medium schools and for action to provide such places rests with individual local authorities. Conclusions on the need to add (or remove) Welsh-medium school places should be set out in the authority's annual school organisation plan. This should be consistent with its published Welsh education scheme.

Several local education authorities have identified in their school organisation plans a need to expand Welsh-medium provision and are in the process of bringing forward proposals. This normally requires local consultation and the publication of statutory notices. If there are objections the case comes to me, as Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, to determine on the balance of the evidence and arguments presented. Any targets for increased provision set out in a Welsh education scheme are thus conditional upon successful completion of the necessary statutory processes.

Welsh Baccalaureate

Q13 Jonathan Morgan: Does the Minister plan to replace A-level qualifications with the Welsh baccalaureate? (OAQ18868) *Transferred for written answer.*

Jane Davidson: The Welsh baccalaureate is designed so that traditional, existing qualifications, including general certificate of education A-levels, will be the building blocks that will form the optional component of the qualification. This key feature of the Welsh baccalaureate will protect the interests of students in the pilot programme.

Teachers (Stress-related Illness and Absence)

Q14 Val Lloyd: What action has the Minister taken to tackle the problem of stress-related illness and absence in the teaching profession? (OAQ18879)

Jane Davidson: On 25 April this year I launched Teacher Support Line Cymru—a new confidential 24-hour freephone bilingual support and counselling service for teachers in Wales. The service is manned by fully qualified counsellors, many of whom are ex-teachers. Half the cost will be met by the Assembly Government. The service is widely welcomed as a positive contribution to tackling stress-related problems experienced by the profession.

Short-term Exclusions

Q15 Mick Bates: How many short-term exclusions were there in Wales last year? (OAQ18929) [R]

Jane Davidson: In the academic year 2000-01 there were 11,674 recorded fixed-term exclusions from maintained schools in Wales. Further information on these figures can be found in the national Assembly for Wales statistical release 11/2002 which was published on 3 April 2002.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Smoking Rates

Q7 Alun Pugh: Does the Minister accept that differential smoking rates are the largest factor in health inequalities in Wales? (OAQ18853)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): Smoking is an identifiable factor which contributes to the gap in healthy life expectancy between those most in need and those most advantaged. However, health inequalities are also inextricably linked to a variety of social, economic and environmental determinants such as housing quality, availability and accessibility of health, social care and educational services, employment opportunities and pollution levels. These underlying social conditions must be addressed in order to successfully tackle individual risk factors such as smoking, diet or physical exercise.

Ambulance Provision

Q8 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on ambulance provision in mid and west Wales? (OAQ18848)

Jane Hutt: The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust provides ambulance services to a population of 465,000 in mid and west Wales in what is a predominantly rural area.

I announced an additional £1 million for emergency ambulance services in January and the trust has now agreed with Dyfed Powys Health Authority how this will be utilised in their area. The funding will provide an uplift in relief provision across the trust, conversion of one standby station at Whitland to full 24-hour cover, an ambulance in Newtown, Powys, and conversion of the rapid response vehicle at Cardigan to an ambulance. Both ambulances will operate five days a week for eight hours a day.

Renal Dialysis Services

Q9 Alun Cairns: Would the Minister make a statement on renal dialysis services in Wales? (OAQ18959)

Jane Hutt: Our strategy for improving the planning, delivery and quality of health services is through national service frameworks. I have announced that a renal services national service framework will be developed for Wales, which will address dialysis services.

An external advisory group, whose role will be to provide advice on the national service framework's development and implementation, will be set up shortly, and a project manager appointed to ensure timely delivery of the national service framework.

Epilepsy-related Deaths

Q10 Brian Hancock: Will the Minister make a statement on increasing awareness of epilepsy-related deaths among health professionals? (OAQ18945)

Jane Hutt: The report of the National Sentinel Clinical Audit of Epilepsy-related Death was published in May by Epilepsy Bereaved. It was commissioned by all four UK health departments. Participating organisations included the International League against Epilepsy (British Branch), the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of Pathologists and the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Delayed Transfers of Care

Q11 Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister make a statement on tackling the problem of delayed transfers of care from hospitals throughout Wales? (OAQ18893)

Jane Hutt: Throughout Wales, the NHS and local authorities, together with their partners in the independent and voluntary sectors, are working to prevent avoidable admissions and reduce delayed transfers of care. I am aware of many initiatives including discharge support, rapid response teams and additional domiciliary care packages that have been established across Wales to tackle delayed transfers of care.

To assist these local efforts, the Welsh Assembly Government has made available a total of £17 million over two years to local authorities to help tackle delayed transfer of care and strengthen the care home sector.

On 1 July, Edwina Hart launched the rapid response adaptations programme which has, as one of its objectives, to allow small-scale adaptations to homes to be done quickly to facilitate discharge from hospital.

Action has been taken to improve radically the recording, monitoring and analysis of the incidence and causes of delayed discharges. Work is also in hand to collate and disseminate good practice and guidance on discharge processes.

Respite Care

Q12 Janet Davies: What plans does the Minister have to improve comprehensive provision of respite care for severely disabled people? (OAQ18948)

Jane Hutt: The provision of respite care for severely disabled people is a matter for local determination by local and/or health authorities and should be included within their planning for children and adults services in collaboration with the relevant agencies, including the voluntary sector.

I am taking a number of steps. Since 2001-02, I have made available to local authorities £17 million through the carers' special grant scheme to improve services for the benefit of carers. The bulk of this has been applied to the provision of additional respite care, including respite for disabled people. I am also developing direct payments and voucher schemes to allow disabled people greater independence and choice in respite and other services.

General Practitioner Contracts

Q13 David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on the recruitment and retention requirements of the proposed GP contracts? (OAQ18939)

Jane Hutt: I cannot quantify the workforce implication of the new GP contract until the next detailed stage of negotiations has been completed. I hope the principles set out in the framework agreement will reduce the workload on GPs by making more use of other primary care professionals.

Upgrading of Doctors' Surgeries

Q14 Peter Rogers: Will the Minister make a statement on the coming into force date of the regulations necessitating the upgrading of doctors' surgeries to meet national standards? (OAQ18961)

Jane Hutt: Welsh Health Estates is currently undertaking an audit of GP premises in Wales. Its findings will determine the priorities for upgrading GP premises.

In addition, the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and the concept of 'reasonable adjustments', place wide-ranging requirements on service providers. By 2004, service providers, including GP premises, are required to make reasonable adjustments to their premises to overcome physical barriers to access. This will be considered in the audit.

Cancer Research

Q15 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement on the funding of cancer research in Wales? (OAQ18955)

Jane Hutt: Research into cancer is recognised as a top priority in Wales.

- The Wales cancer trials network has been jointly funded by the Assembly and Cancer Research Campaign since 1998. This year and for the next two financial years the cancer trials network will receive additional funding of nearly £1.7 million to fund the new phase of its work.
- The new research and development strategy for health and social care includes the recommendation that a co-ordinated five-year programme of cancer research is developed for Wales.
- Research and development funding for cancer in Wales for the financial year 2000-01 totalled £2.6 million to NHS providers and £167,000 on research grants funded by the Wales Office of Research and Development.
- The Welsh cancer centres are active participants in many multicentre trials funded by national charities and research councils.