

Written Questions answered between 16 and 23 October 2003

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

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

Contents

2	Questions to the First Minister
5	Questions to the Minister for Economic Development and Transport
7	Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning
12	Questions to the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside
15	Questions to the Finance Minister
17	Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services
25	Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration

Questions to the First Minister

Visit to Australia

William Graham: Will the First Minister detail the itinerary of his visit to Australia during the October 2003 recess? (WAQ28977)

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): The programme is still being finalised, but I can confirm that there are plans for me to undertake a number of meetings with key figures in Government in Sydney and in Canberra, including Bob Carr, premier of New South Wales. I will be undertaking an extensive programme of meetings with existing and potential inward investors, organised by the Welsh Development Agency, as well as launching the Wales world showcase in Sydney. I am also leading the largest trade mission that Wales Trade International has taken to Australia, and will be hosting a reception for the trade mission businesses and potential trade partners. I will be speaking at a major business event arranged by the Australian British Chamber of Commerce and the committee for Melbourne. We propose to re-affirm our memorandum of understanding with New South Wales, following which I will attend the Wales v. New Zealand rugby match as a guest of the New South Wales Government. A copy of the full programme has been published as further information to this question.

Ministerial Visits Abroad

Nick Bourne: Will the First Minister provide a list of all the trips abroad on Assembly Government business undertaken by each Cabinet Minister between 1 January 2002 and 30 September 2003? (WAQ29062)

Nick Bourne: Will the First Minister advise the reason for each Cabinet ministerial visit abroad from 1 January 2002 to 30 September 2003, and the cost? (WAQ29081)

The First Minister: A list of the overseas visits by Cabinet Ministers on Government business for the period January 2002 to September 2003 is shown below. The cost and reason for each trip is shown. The list does not include visits to Brussels on Assembly business.

Ministers' overseas visits, January 2001 to September 2003

Minister	Visited	Date	Total Cost	Reason
Rhodri Morgan	New York	1/3/02 - 5/3/02	N/A	St David's day celebrations and tourism promotion
	South Africa	30/8/02 - 6/9/02	£2,081.20	World summit on sustainable development and trade mission
	Australia	7/9/02 - 13/9/02	£5,039.05	Trade mission and inward investment promotion
	Saudi Arabia	7/10/02-13/10/02	£2,378.10	Trade mission and Government to Government talks
	Italy	13/11/02	£1,319.70	Legislative powers presidential conference
	Poitiers	2/12/02	£968.10	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe political bureau
	Rome/ Brussels	14/2/03	£984.65	Italy: Wales Abroad/ meeting Italian Ministers Brussels: future of cohesion policy
	Greece	15/5/03-16/5/03	£1,067	Ministerial meeting on regional policy

Minister	Visited	Date	Total Cost	Reason
	Barcelona	19/6/03 - 20/6/03	£604.30	Speaking at British Council conference and inward investment promotion
	Estonia/ Latvia/Milan	1/9/03 - 7/9/03	£9,259	Participation in 'Wales in Estonia' week, and trade mission and inward investment promotion
	St Malo	11/9/03 - 12/9/03	£2,628	Attend Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe
Carwyn Jones	Strasbourg	1/7/02 - 2/7/02	£150.34	Foot and mouth disease inquiry
	USA (Philadelphia)	28/8/02	£4,858.10	Cymanfa ganu (Harrisburg) supporting Wales Trade International
	New York	28/6/03 - 1/7/03	£6,747	National Association for the Specialty Food Trade's food promotion event
	Perth, Western Australia	14/9/03 - 20/9/03	£16,080	Conference of the international network of regional governments for sustainable development
Jane Davidson	Italy*	5/6/02	£772.00	Meeting ministerial counterpart
	Basque Country	24/9/02	£1,044.70	Bilingualism and early years
	Netherlands	25/9/02 - 27/9/02	£1,019.70	Attend European conference
	Denmark	4/10/02	£475.20	European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning conference
	Italy	13/12/02 - 14/12/02	£911.70	EARLALL conference
	New South Wales	22/8/03 - 29/8/03	£10,669	Forge education links and benchmark Wales as a learning country
Jenny Randerson	Paris	15/3/02 - 16/3/02	N/A	Lorient Interceltique festival
	Basque Country	9/4/02 - 12/4/02	£273.34	Minority languages in Spain
	Jersey	13/6/02 - 14/6/02	£485.00	British-Irish council
	Brittany	3/8/02 - 6/8/02	£315.00	Lorient arts festival
	Italy	17/10/02	£744.50	Regional Ministers of culture conference
	Strasbourg*	16/2/03	£304.40	Speak at culture Ministers' conference
Michael German	New York	6/7/02 - 9/7/02	£3,518.00	Fancy food fair (WDA) and visit site for Assembly's New York office
	Greece	19/9/02 - 20/9/02	£1,240.88	Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe
	Spain	27/9/02 - 29/9/02	£575.10	Conference (four motor regions) Future Farmers Wales research trip

Minister	Visited	Date	Total Cost	Reason
	Paris*	21/10/02 - 22/10/02	£536.10	<i>Salon International de l'Alimentation</i> (food industry event)
Sue Essex	Helsinki	26/3/02 - 28/3/02	N/A	Sustainable development visits and meetings with Finnish environment division and Helsinki planning department
	Paris	7/11/02	£294.00	European council of town planners
Andrew Davies	Jersey	13/6/02 - 14/6/02	£485.00	British-Irish council
	Brittany	3/8/02 - 6/8/02	£429.00	Interceltique festival
	USA/Canada	10/9/02 - 27/9/02	£6,503.76	Trade mission
	Prague	5/12/02 - 6/12/02	£178.27	Trade mission
	Dublin	10/7/03	£326	Launch of new Stena Line ship and meeting with chief executive officer
	Brittany	4/8/03 - 7/8/03	£2,166	Annual Interceltique festival
Jane Hutt	Dublin	22/3/02	N/A	Dublin summit
	Helsinki	26/3/02 - 28/3/02	N/A	Sustainable development visits and meetings with Finnish environment division and Helsinki planning department
Brian Gibbons	Katania (Sicily)	13/11/02	£513.27	World Health Organisation conference (for the Minister for Health and Social Services)

* Denotes air fare only.

Financial procedures in 2001-02 did not facilitate the accurate separation of ministerial overseas travel and subsistence costs, hence the non-availability of cost figures for the period January to March 2002. Financial procedures in 2002-03 facilitated the collection of data only on the cost of Ministers and their private secretaries travelling overseas. From 2003-04, procedures have been amended to allow the collection of data for the total costs of overseas trips, including the costs of any accompanying officials.

Welsh Assembly Government Representation

Michael German: How many times during the past 12 months has the Welsh Assembly Government been represented at the weekly Friday meetings with the UK's Permanent Representation to the EU and the Cabinet Office European Secretariat? (WAQ29082)

The First Minister: The Welsh Assembly Government has been directly represented on four occasions. Attendance is largely dependent on the content of the agenda and the availability of staff.

European Regional Aid

Alun Cairns: Would the First Minister make a statement on the latest developments of European regional aid policy post-2006? (WAQ29084)

The First Minister: The European Commission has begun preparatory work on drawing up regional aid guidelines for the post-2006 period. The Assembly Government is working closely with the UK

Government and the European Commission, and is committed to securing the best possible settlement for Wales.

Questions to the Minister for Economic Development and Transport

Finance Wales

Alun Cairns: Does the Minister intend to publish the investigation launched into Finance Wales by the chief executive officer of the WDA mentioned at the Economic Development and Transport Committee meeting on 17 July 2003? (WAQ27606)

Substantive answer following holding reply issued on 1 August 2003.

The Minister for Economic Development and Transport (Andrew Davies): This is an operational matter for the WDA. However, Graham Hawker, the chief executive of the WDA, has provided me with the following information in response to your written question:

‘It is not intended to publish the investigation, as it is an internal matter for the WDA’.

I have received an undertaking from him that he will inform me of the outcome of this, and consideration will then be given as to whether a statement needs to be made.

ICT Business Support Centres

Alun Cairns: How many small businesses have used Link ICT business support centres since September 2002? (WAQ27680)

Substantive answer following holding reply issued on 19 August 2003.

Andrew Davies: In its national economic development strategy, ‘A Winning Wales’, the Welsh Assembly Government makes the commitment to promoting information and communications technologies by providing practical, accessible support to businesses, to encourage and enable them to make successful use of ICT and e-commerce.

In England, ICT advice is delivered through the business link organisations, which are an arm of the Department of Trade and Industry’s small business service. However, in Wales, the Assembly Government has commissioned the WDA to deliver an all-Wales network of 21 ICT support centres, which provide small and medium-sized enterprises with this free and impartial ICT support.

Based on management information provided by the WDA between September 2002 and July 2003, 5,602 small and medium-sized enterprises have received technical advice from this network of 21 ICT support centres. During the same period, these ICT support centres have answered 12,383 technical inquiries and delivered awareness-raising events to over 5,000 people.

ICT Business Support Centres

Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on Link ICT business support centres? (WAQ27681)

Substantive answer following holding reply issued on 19 August 2003.

Andrew Davies: In its national economic development strategy, ‘A Winning Wales’, the Welsh Assembly Government makes the commitment to promoting information and communications technologies by providing practical, accessible support to businesses, to encourage and enable them to make successful use of ICT and e-commerce.

In England, ICT advice is delivered through the business link organisations, which are an arm of the Department of Trade and Industry's small business service. However, in Wales, the Assembly Government has commissioned the WDA, and provided £750,000 per annum funding, to deliver an all-Wales network of ICT support centres, which provide small and medium-sized enterprises with this free and impartial ICT support.

The all-Wales network of ICT support centres concentrates its ICT support on the initial adopters, by offering face-to-face first-line ICT advice with a local adviser, and by presenting a series of events aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises to raise awareness of the business benefits that can be realised by the effective implementation of ICT solutions. All the ICT advisers have, or are working towards having, the 'technology means business' accreditation to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises receive appropriate, impartial advice. The £115 million Broadband Wales programme has allowed the WDA to equip the main ICT support centres to offer a 'try-before-you-buy' service and showcase satellite and, where available, digital subscriber line broadband technologies to small and medium-sized enterprises.

ICT support centres are just one of the ICT support programmes available to small and medium-sized enterprises in Wales. The Objective 1-funded Opportunity Wales programme delivers more sophisticated e-commerce advice to small and medium-sized enterprises. The Welsh Assembly Government has supported this very successful programme with Pathway to Prosperity match funding. The Opportunity Wales programme has delivered e-commerce advice to nearly 4,000 small and medium-sized enterprises across the Objective 1 region.

High-level in-depth ICT advice for the larger small and medium-sized enterprises in the Objective 1 region is delivered by the recently launched Objective 1-funded SME business programme. Other Objective 1-funded ICT support programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises include the Wales application service provision project. That targets small and medium-sized enterprises in the manufacturing sector that would benefit from applications such as enterprise resource planning and the WDA's high-tech Wales information society trailer, which tours all of Wales demonstrating the benefits of ICT solutions.

The State of the Roads in South Wales East

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on the state of roads in South Wales East and any plans that he may have to improve them? (WAQ28037)

Substantive answer following holding reply issued on 23 September 2003.

Andrew Davies: Road maintenance is carried out as required to keep roads safe and in reasonable condition.

Widening the A470

Jonathan Morgan: Is the Minister aware of any plans to widen, or does he have any intentions to fund a widening of, the A470 road north of junction 32 of the M4 in Cardiff? (WAQ29061)

Andrew Davies: The Welsh Assembly Government's transport directorate has carried out a study to identify and assess ways of making better use of the A470 between Pontypridd and junction 32 of the M4. The study identified three main objectives: improving traffic flow; increasing the reliability of journey times; and facilitating reduced traffic demand.

A public consultation is shortly to take place at Tongwynlais, on 27 and 28 October, where officials from the Assembly Government's transport directorate will be explaining fully the proposals that we aim to implement and taking comments from the public on how the proposals may be improved. As part of the

range of proposed measures being developed, the existing south-bound hard shoulder, between the Radyr and Coryton junctions, may be used as a running lane.

Access Legislation

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister provide details on what financial help will be available to help businesses in Wales comply with access legislation coming into force in October 2004? (WAQ29069)

Andrew Davies: The Welsh Assembly Government has no plans to provide financial aid to service providers to help them to comply with the provisions in Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Service providers will only ever have to do what is reasonable to meet their access obligations. October 2004 was chosen as an implementation date to give service providers time to prepare for new responsibilities, and we expect service providers to take account of these duties when planning any refurbishment.

Improving the A470

Jonathan Morgan: Further to your answer to WAQ29061, what are the proposals being considered to improve the A470 between Pontypridd and junction 32 of the M4? (WAQ29119)

Andrew Davies: A balanced range of measures has been developed for improving traffic flow and reducing congestion on the A470 between Pontypridd and Coryton. These have been discussed in outline at consultation meetings with key stakeholders. The package of proposals includes improvement to public transport, including enlargement of park-and-ride sites, improved cycle provision on the local road network and at the Coryton interchange, and the provision of closed-circuit television and variable message signs. In addition, junction improvements are proposed at Pontypridd (Broadway) and Nantgarw.

The most congested and critical area of the A470 is south-bound between Radyr and Coryton. Improvements here will, in addition to the above, involve using the existing hard shoulder as an additional traffic lane. A queue-detection system, safety refuges and a possible reduced speed limit are additional measures being considered for this section of the A470.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

‘Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: A National Agreement’

Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement on ‘Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: A National Agreement’? (WAQ28976) [R]

Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement about the teachers’ workload agreement? (WAQ29025)

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): The first phase of changes to the teachers’ contract took effect in September. It requires that teachers should no longer routinely carry out 24 identified administrative tasks, that members of the leadership group in schools should have a reasonable allocation of time to carry out their duties, and that schools should have regard to teachers’ work-life balance when setting tasks. The changes apply to all maintained schools in Wales, and are a statutory requirement.

The Assembly Government provided £3 million this year to help schools, particularly smaller schools, to deal with the transfer of administrative tasks from teachers. Since many of these schools are also in rural areas, the £3.5 million funds provided for small and rural schools may also be used for that purpose. That funding was additional to an increase of £261 million in the local government settlement this year, which took account of all pay and price pressures identified by local authorities, including teachers’ pay.

We have taken into account the likely pressures on local authorities and schools arising from future contractual changes. The draft local government settlement, published this week, provides an increase of £152 million, which should be sufficient to meet our assessment of the costs of pay and price pressures identified by local authorities, as well as providing an additional £30 million. That makes £33 million in total to meet the anticipated costs of implementing the contractual change in 2004-05.

Increased use of support staff is a key feature of the agreement. I will be consulting shortly on draft regulations under section 133 of the Education Act 2002, defining what work may be done only by a qualified teacher and what tasks may be done by other staff in support of teachers, under the direction and supervision of a qualified teacher. At the same time, I shall be consulting on standards for higher level teaching assistants.

The agreement requires the Assembly Government to take further steps to reduce bureaucratic burdens on teachers. I am therefore strengthening the team of officials responsible for this work, and intend to appoint an independent panel from the profession to oversee its work, along the lines of the implementation review unit in England.

Educating Children about Accidents in the Home

Rosemary Butler: Can the Minister outline how children in Wales are educated about the causes of accidents in the home? (WAQ29024)

Jane Davidson: As you know, personal and social education in schools plays a key role in children's development, and one of its main aims is to instil knowledge and skills for adult life. Providing children with knowledge and understanding about physical dangers in the home and recognising how to be safe there is covered in key stages 1 and 2 of the personal and social education framework for Wales. The Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales developed this framework in 2000 alongside the introduction of the national curriculum for Wales. The framework for personal and social education draws together best practice from schools around Wales and was implemented on a non-statutory basis with a commitment to review this status. Following further advice from ACCAC, I decided that personal and social education should be a statutory entitlement for all young people, and it became part of the basic curriculum in Wales from September 2003.

The Reduction of Primary Class Sizes

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on her policy on the reduction of class sizes in primary schools in Wales? (WAQ29026)

Jane Davidson: There is a statutory limit on the number of children in infant-age classes, and infant class sizes remain at an historically low level in Wales. The targeted additional funding that we have provided in three successive years has also brought about reductions in the size of junior classes throughout Wales. In September 2000, 29 per cent of junior school pupils were in classes containing more than 30 children. In September 2002, this figure had reduced to 17 per cent. The number of very large classes of over 35 pupils had fallen from 112 in 2000 to 28 in 2002. The target for September 2003 was to reduce the number of classes of over 30 pupils to virtually none. The results of the September class size count should be known before the end of 2003.

Dyslexia

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on how many teachers in Wales have been on courses to identify and deal with dyslexia? (WAQ29027)

Jane Davidson: Information on the number of teachers who have attended such training courses is not held centrally.

I have nevertheless made additional money available through grants for education support and training, to enable local education authorities to provide training for teachers and learning support assistants, including those who teach children with dyslexia.

I am also aware that Swansea local education authority has developed a dyslexia-friendly schools model and that this includes British Dyslexia Association-accredited courses for both teachers and learning support assistants. I believe that a number of other local education authorities in Wales have either already adopted or are considering adopting this model.

The University of Wales

Jenny Randerson: What discussions has the Minister had with the University of Wales about the proposed merger of higher education institutes in Wales? (WAQ29028)

Jane Davidson: I met representatives of the University of Wales on 7 October. I have also met the governing bodies of several higher education institutions in Wales to discuss their reconfiguration proposals, and I plan to meet with representatives of all institutions by the end of the calendar year.

Newborn Hearing Screening Programme

Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the role of early intervention in assisting with the speech and language development of very young children diagnosed with hearing difficulties through the £1.75 million newborn hearing screening programme currently being rolled out in Wales? (WAQ29029)
Transferred for answer by the Minister for Health and Social Services.

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): The newborn hearing screening programme allows severe hearing loss to be identified in the first weeks of life, and should lead to improvements in language development and the general development of the child and family. The programme was launched in parts of north Wales in March 2003 and is scheduled to be fully rolled out in 2004.

Additionally, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning and I are currently consulting on the future delivery of speech and language services.

The Provision of GEST Funding

Ann Jones: What discussions has the Minister had with local education authorities in north Wales regarding the provision of GEST funding for books and curriculum materials? (WAQ29030)

Jane Davidson: The grants for education support and training programme has been developed year-on-year in consultation with local education authorities, the Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, Estyn, the General Teaching Council for Wales and others. Changes take account of the ongoing evaluation of the programme as well as evidence from Estyn inspections and emerging policy priorities. The decision to remove the provision of funding for 'new books and other materials' followed detailed discussions about grants for education support and training with representatives of LEAs, which took place during the summer of 2002. My officials then formally consulted with local education authorities and others through the publication of the draft circular and the annual consultation meeting with grants for education support and training co-ordinators, which included representatives from north Wales. The draft GEST circular for 2004-05 will be published shortly.

Welsh-medium Education

Nick Bourne: What is the Minister doing to help Welsh-medium education? (WAQ29031)

Jane Davidson: Our strategic framework in support of Welsh and Welsh-medium education is set out in ‘Iaith Pawb’, which was formally launched in February 2003. Since that time, we have:

- commissioned an audit of the current provision of training and development needs for Welsh-medium and bilingual early-years education;
- made £2 million available in 2004-05 to improve and increase the training and provision of early years Welsh-medium and bilingual education;
- made £400,000 available to ACCAC in 2004-05 to support its work on Welsh-medium materials and qualifications;
- ensured that bilingualism is a separate area of learning within our foundation stage proposals;
- remitted ACCAC to advise on issues of linguistic continuity and measuring pupils’ progress along a linguistic continuum;
- arranged for initial discussions to be held with local education authorities about defining Welsh-medium provision;
- funded the appointment, from September 2003, of a project director to develop and implement pilot projects to establish second entry points into Welsh-medium education;
- remitted the National Council—ELWa to ensure that the range of opportunities to enable Welsh-medium learning continues throughout life;
- required the Sector Skills Development Agency to ensure that, as a condition of its licence, sector skills councils have a Welsh language scheme;
- required the three main education and training Assembly sponsored public bodies to mainstream Welsh in their policy-development and programme-delivery mechanisms in their remit letter for 2003-04;
- considered a report from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales into future levels of supply and demand in Welsh-medium higher education; and
- approved four statutory proposals from Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan local education authorities for enhanced Welsh-medium school provision.

Further measures will follow as set out in ‘Iaith Pawb’ including, from 2005-06, provision for sabbaticals for teachers and practitioners in schools and further education.

Education Funding in Mid and West Wales

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on education funding in mid and west Wales? (WAQ29032)

Jane Davidson: The paper presented to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on 9 July 2003—reference ELL (2) 02-03 (p. 2)—showed that, overall, Welsh authorities increased their individual schools’ budgets by 10.1 per cent and overall education budgets by 9.7 per cent in 2003-04. Figures for individual authorities are contained in the paper.

Contact Sports in Secondary Schools

David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on the playing of contact sports in secondary schools? (WAQ29033)

Jane Davidson: In meeting the requirements of the national curriculum programme of study for physical education, all schools are required to provide opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of activities so that they can develop and use their skills in situations appropriate to their ability. For example, in key stage 3, pupils should be taught health-related exercise and be provided with the opportunity to participate in four activities selected from games, gymnastics, dance, swimming, athletics and outdoor and adventurous activities. Within this framework, however, it is for teachers to determine the particular range and mix of activities, which might include contact sports, offered to pupils in the context of the school’s scheme of work and the facilities available.

In the delivery of physical education and school sport all teachers are required to observe the requirements for pupil safety set out the school's health and safety policy. The policy should complement the relevant health and safety guidance prepared by the local authority. In addition, the Health and Safety Commission publishes guidance for governing bodies on health and safety matters.

The New Deal

Lorraine Barrett: Can the Minister make a statement on the progress of the New Deal in Cardiff South and Penarth? (WAQ29034)

Jane Davidson: The New Deal is delivered in Wales by Jobcentre Plus and, as such, is not the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the success of the New Deal in Wales. The New Deal for young people has helped 30,700 people in Wales to secure employment, while 8,700 have secured jobs through New Deal 25 plus and 14,700 through New Deal for lone parents (figures as at the end of June 2003).

For the Cardiff South and Penarth constituency, 2,230 young people have participated in the programme and 1,230 have been helped into employment (between April 1998 and June 2003). For the long-term unemployed (25 plus), 750 people have participated on the enhanced programme, and 240 have been helped into employment (between April 2001 and June 2003). No data are currently available for the New Deal for lone parents or for the long-term unemployed prior to April 2001.

Pupil Safety

Lorraine Barrett: What action is the Welsh Assembly Government taking to ensure pupil safety in Welsh schools? (WAQ29035)

Jane Davidson: I refer you to my answer given in response to WAQ24229 on 22 May 2003.

Difference in Funding

Leighton Andrews: Will the Minister make a statement on the basis for the difference in funding year 6 on a 1:30 teacher-to-pupil ratio, and year 7 on a 1:21 teacher-to-pupil ratio? (WAQ29057)

Jane Davidson: Local education authorities often use teacher-pupil ratios in their formulae for distributing delegated funding to schools. Their use is a matter for each authority in light of consultation with its schools on the make-up of the funding formula.

The Royal National Institute for the Deaf

Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the outcomes of her meeting on 10 September 2003 with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf regarding education provision for deaf children in Wales? (WAQ29070)

Jane Davidson: My meeting with the RNID on 10 September was very productive. The topics discussed included the outcomes of the report carried out by the RNID, part-funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, into the service provided to children aged between 0 and 2 with hearing difficulties, the education provision for hearing-impaired children across Wales and the training of teachers of the hearing impaired. I was heartened that many of the issues raised by the RNID are already being considered by a joint Welsh Assembly/LEA officers' group, which is drafting a report for me on the educational services available. I hope to launch this report for consultation later this year.

Newborn Hearing Screening across Wales

Ann Jones: Further to her meeting on 10 September 2003 with the RNID regarding education provision for deaf children in Wales, will the Minister make a statement on the additional provision of teachers of the deaf, development of appropriate materials and staff development programmes required as a consequence of the roll-out of newborn hearing screening across Wales? (WAQ29071)

Jane Davidson: I am aware that, for children with low-incidence disabilities, the level of service delivery across Wales is variable. With that in mind, I have initiated a review of the current provision. The national steering group for special educational needs is undertaking this in conjunction with local education authorities, voluntary bodies and other interested parties. I anticipate that the report produced by this working group will be made available to me later this month. I expect that the report, which will include minimum standards of service delivery, together with options for models of delivery, will be issued for consultation later this year. Depending on the responses received, I will consider issuing guidance on the minimum standard level of service required in order to ensure that all children in Wales identified with a hearing impairment receive appropriate educational support.

Questions to the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside

Planning Application to Extend East Pit

Glyn Davies: When was the planning application to extend East Pit near Gwauncaegurwen submitted, when was it decided by the local authority, and when was the decision made to 'call in' the application? (WAQ29049)

The Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Carwyn Jones): Celtic Energy Ltd applied for planning permission for the extension of the existing open-cast coal site followed by restoration and aftercare management at East Pit on 8 August 2001. The council was minded to refuse permission and the applicants withdrew the application on 3 May 2002. Celtic Energy Ltd submitted a revised planning application on 31 July 2002. On 17 February 2003, the local authority's planning committee resolved to grant permission for the revised application, subject to conditions. The Assembly was asked by a number of correspondents to consider calling-in the application, the first of which was received on 21 February. Sue Essex AM (then Minister with responsibility for planning) decided to call in the planning application on 3 April.

Planning Application to Extend East Pit

Glyn Davies: Has a date been set for the public inquiry into the revised application to extend East Pit near Gwauncaegurwen? (WAQ29050)

Carwyn Jones: A date has not yet been agreed by the main parties, but the planning inspectorate expects agreement to be reached very shortly. A pre-inquiry meeting has already been arranged, and will take place at the civic centre, Port Talbot on 29 October.

Planning Application to Extend East Pit

Glyn Davies: Why was the decision taken to 'call in' the planning application to extend East Pit near Gwauncaegurwen? (WAQ29051)

Carwyn Jones: The Assembly Government will only call in an application if it raises issues of more than local importance. Sue Essex AM, while she was Minister for Environment, decided that the application raised issues of more than local importance, in that the development could have wide effects or may give rise to substantial controversy beyond the immediate locality. She concluded that this justified a decision to call in the application.

Planning Application to Extend East Pit

Glyn Davies: Who took the decision to 'call in' the planning application to extend East Pit near Gwauncaegurwen? (WAQ29052)

Carwyn Jones: Sue Essex AM, while she was the Assembly Government's Minister for Environment.

Training for Food Procurement Managers

Michael German: What steps is the Minister taking to provide a training package for food procurement managers in the public sector to enable them to better source Welsh produce? (WAQ29053)

Carwyn Jones: The Welsh Assembly Government's local food procurement steering group, working with the WDA food directorate and the Wales procurement initiative team, is continuing to develop local and national actions aimed at increasing awareness and improving the knowledge base for food procurement managers. The Wales procurement initiative will be facilitating courses in 2004 for the Welsh public-sector procurement community, which will identify opportunities for 'buying smaller' (for example, by reviewing tender specifications) and 'buying local' (for example, by developing links with local suppliers).

Farming Connect Projects in Objective 2 Areas

Lisa Francis: Will the Minister make a statement on the discussions that the Assembly and the Wales Tourist Board have had about extending funding to tourism-related Farming Connect projects in Objective 2 areas? (WAQ29072)

Carwyn Jones: Funding is available for farmers for tourism-related Farming Connect projects in Objective 2 areas, but there is strong competition for the resources available and farm businesses have to compete with other small and medium-sized enterprises. The discussions that the Assembly has had with the Wales Tourist Board have centred on investigating the possibilities for securing additional funding, and these discussions are continuing. I understand that the WTB is now in the process of making an application for funding from the Objective 2 programme. I am well aware of the frustration that these delays are causing farmers in east Wales, and I have asked my officials to take a close interest in the progress of this issue. They will shortly be meeting Jonathan Jones of the WTB to discuss whether anything else can be done to ease the situation.

Mwrog Street Flood Alleviation Scheme

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on the discussions between his officials and Denbighshire County Council on Friday 10 October 2003 on the Mwrog Street flood alleviation scheme? (WAQ29073)

Carwyn Jones: On Friday, 10 October, my officials met with officers of Denbighshire County Council and inspected the works undertaken to date on the Mwrog Street flood alleviation scheme. The nature and extent of scheme variations, which have led to increased project costs, were discussed both at the meeting and during the subsequent scheme inspection. As a result, my officials are now better placed to assess the grant eligibility of those scheme variations. However, to fully assess the variations, further information will be required, and council officers have been asked to provide additional information to assist in that assessment.

Amersham Plc

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the time period available to the general public to make responses to the Environment Agency's draft proposals regarding the re-authorisation of Amersham plc, and will he clarify how and to whom these responses may be made? (WAQ29077)

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: When will the Minister make a decision on the Environment Agency's draft proposals regarding the re-authorisation of Amersham plc? (WAQ29078)

Carwyn Jones: Between 2001 and 2003, the Environment Agency undertook a detailed consideration of the application from Amersham plc to vary the company's authorisation for radioactive discharges at its site in north Cardiff. This included consultation with public bodies, local people and interested groups. The agency has now submitted its proposed decision to the Welsh Assembly Government in order to allow Ministers to consider whether to exercise their statutory powers under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. I hope to make a decision shortly as to whether to exercise statutory powers under the 1993 Act in respect of the Environment Agency's proposed decision on this application.

I remain free to intervene and to direct the agency to vary or revoke an authorisation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 at any time should the circumstances require. Comments on all aspects of government, including the activities of the Environment Agency and the licences that it may issue, are therefore welcome and with no fixed timescale.

Wales Fisheries Strategy

Mick Bates: Can the Minister give me an update on what progress is being made to ensure the implementation of the Wales fisheries strategy by the end of this calendar year? (WAQ29080)

Carwyn Jones: The strategy will have three main components. First, the strategy for the 'development of Welsh fisheries and aquaculture sector' has been completed and published, and copies are available in the Library. Secondly, 'a strategy for the recreational fisheries of Wales' has been completed and a parallel action plan is being prepared. The third component focuses on the outcome of 2002 review of the EU common fisheries policy and its effects on the Welsh fishing industry. This has UK dimensions and, recently, the Prime Minister directed the Cabinet Office strategy unit to examine options for a sustainable UK fishing industry in the medium to long-term. The unit, in partnership with the four UK fisheries Ministers and industry stakeholders, will produce a strategy document later this year, which I will wish to consider before finalising the all-Wales strategy.

The Rural Observatory

Glyn Davies: What are the estimated costs of the rural observatory in a full financial year? (WAQ29126)
A revised answer to the above question was issued on 28 October 2003.

Carwyn Jones: The Welsh Assembly Government's budgetary provision for the rural observatory is £300,000 per annum.

The Detection and Control of Bovine Tuberculosis

Carl Sargeant: What short-term measures does the Minister propose to introduce in the next 12 months to improve the detection and control of bovine tuberculosis in cattle? (WAQ29127)

Carwyn Jones: A policy review is currently being undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government in co-operation with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The review will lead to a GB-wide strategy for dealing with bovine tuberculosis, which will be issued for wide consultation later this year.

The Detection and Control of Bovine Tuberculosis

Carl Sargeant: What measures has the Minister introduced in the past 12 months to improve the detection and control of bovine tuberculosis in cattle? (WAQ29128)

Carwyn Jones: Over the past 12 months, the Welsh Assembly Government, in tandem with the UK Government, has introduced a package of measures designed to address the increased incidence of bovine tuberculosis incidents pending the results of the research programme. In addition to applying extra resources for TB testing, four actions have been implemented:

1. administrative changes to ameliorate the economic effects of movement restrictions on TB-affected herds;
2. a pilot study of the gamma interferon test and severe interpretation of the skin test;
3. the placement of more herds with overdue TB tests under movement restriction; and
4. the establishment of an industry group, which includes Welsh representation, to monitor the progress of measures in place to combat bovine TB.

Questions to the Finance Minister

The Cost of External Consultancies

Lisa Francis: Can the Minister tell me how much the Welsh Assembly Government spent on external consultancies in the first Assembly? (WAQ27841)

Substantive answer following holding reply issued on 9 September 2003.

The Finance Minister (Sue Essex): Between 1999-2000 and 2002-03, the National Assembly for Wales spent £7.9 million from its central administration budget on legal advice, accountancy services, architects and planning advice, management consultancy, marketing and publicity, statistical services and research studies. This represents 1.6 per cent of the central administration budget.

The table below sets out details for each financial year of the first Assembly.

	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Annual expenditure (£ million)	1.8	2.3	1.9	1.9
Percentage of the central administration budget	2.0	1.9	1.5	1.3

In addition, there will have been some expenditure on research, evaluation and consultancy contracts in direct support of the Assembly's policy objectives from programme budgets. This information is not collected or held centrally.

Visits to Scotland by the Assembly's New Build Team

Nick Bourne: How many times have members of the Assembly new build team visited Edinburgh on Assembly business? (WAQ28680)

Sue Essex: There have been two visits to the Scottish Parliament building. The first visit was undertaken by senior members of the team, together with project management team. The main topics for discussion were procurement and risk management. The second visit was undertaken by seven members of the team, and the Assembly's professional adviser focused on construction progress, design development and fit-out.

Responsibility for Maintaining and Cleaning Land

Leighton Andrews: What responsibilities do local authorities have to identify the ownership of land that is unclear in order to ensure that basic maintenance and cleaning of such land is taken up? (WAQ28970)

Sue Essex: Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 empowers local planning authorities to serve notices on the owners and occupiers of land, the condition of which adversely affects the amenity of other land in the neighbouring area, requiring them to remedy that condition within a specified period. Authorities also have the power to require the provision of information about interests in land, which is the subject of any such notices.

Local Authorities' Average Expenditure on Children

Leighton Andrews: Will the Minister set out in a table the average expenditure per child in each local authority according to the most recent figures? (WAQ29054)

Sue Essex: A detailed analysis of local education authority budgets for 2003-04 was presented in a paper to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on 9 July 2003 (paper 2). The attached table is an extract from that paper.

Local education authority total school budgets per pupil, 2003-04 (a)

Authority	(£ per pupil)
Isle of Anglesey	3,818
Gwynedd	3,675
Conwy	3,510
Denbighshire	3,242
Flintshire	3,203
Wrexham	3,424
Powys	3,766
Ceredigion	4,119
Pembrokeshire	3,657
Carmarthenshire	3,829
Swansea	3,501
Neath Port Talbot	3,698
Bridgend	3,349
The Vale of Glamorgan	3,185
Cardiff	3,362
Rhondda Cynon Taf	3,423
Merthyr Tydfil	3,676
Caerphilly	3,410
Blaenau Gwent	3,608
Torfaen	3,549
Monmouthshire	3,409
Newport	3,417
Wales	3,499

(a) Total school budgets include amounts delegated to schools and amounts held centrally. The figures are on a net basis, that is, net of expenditure funded by specific Government grants, within the local schools' budget of authorities. The National Council—ELWa grant for post-16 provision in schools is included. The pupil numbers used are based on full-time equivalent pupil numbers in primary, secondary and special schools, as reported on part 1 of the section 52 statement for 2003-04.

Visits to Scotland by the Assembly's New Build Team

Nick Bourne: Further to WAQ28674 to WAQ28681, have there been any other visits to Scotland by the Assembly new build team, and what were the costs of those visits? (WAQ29055)

Sue Essex: As stated in response to WAQ28680, the first visit was undertaken by senior members of the team together with the project management team, and the main topics for discussion were procurement and risk management. That visit was undertaken in early February 2003, and the cost was approximately £1,300.

Payment to Long-serving Councillors

Nick Bourne: What evidence does the Minister have that paying long-serving councillors to stand down will encourage more young people, more women and more ethnic minorities to stand for election? (WAQ29085)

Sue Essex: The introduction of such a scheme was one of the recommendations of the University of Birmingham's Declan Hall report, commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government, as a means of encouraging greater diversity in the council chamber. We have no evidence in the UK, as such a scheme has not been implemented, but the report identified a one-off severance scheme introduced by the Republic of Ireland in 1999, and found that a consequence of the scheme was that it encouraged older councillors to leave office and allowed new members to come forward.

Long-service Payments to Councillors

Nick Bourne: What is the estimated cost to each local authority in Wales of the proposed long-service payments to councillors? (WAQ29087)

Sue Essex: I assume that you are referring to the past service awards. There is no cost except administration, should they decide to introduce the scheme.

Local Authorities' Public Information Departments

Glyn Davies: How many local authorities in Wales have established or plan to establish departments to co-ordinate information given to the public or to communicate information to the public? (WAQ29125)

Sue Essex: Under section 19 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, every local authority has a duty to have a publication scheme, approved by the information commissioner, covering those matters which the authority must publish for public dissemination under the provisions of the Act. They are not obliged to establish specialist departments on this matter or to inform the Assembly should they choose to do so.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

The Projected Spending of NHS Trusts

Alun Cairns: Would the Minister list the projected overspend/underspend of each NHS trust in Wales? (WAQ27848)

Substantive answer following holding reply issued on 9 September 2003.

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): Each month, NHS trusts submit an estimate of their expected financial outturn for the current financial year. At this early stage of the financial year, there are still a number of significant financial risk and opportunity factors being managed by trusts, which will impact on the actual outturn. These estimates are based on the financial positions for the

period ended 31 July 2003, and will inevitably change over the year. The forecasts submitted are detailed in the table below. The Welsh Assembly Government is finalising the details of the loan cover that will be required by trusts forecasting deficits in 2003-04. The deficit of £5.179 million has been agreed for the Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust, and the surplus of £1.065 million forecast by the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust is to enable the repayment of loans taken down in previous years.

July 2003 Financial Position	Income and Expenditure Forecast Surplus/(Deficit) 2003-04 £000s
Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust	(5,179)
North Glamorgan NHS Trust	0
Pontypridd and Rhondda NHS Trust	0
Velindre NHS Trust	(122)
Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust	0
Carmarthenshire NHS Trust	(5,964)
Ceredigion NHS Trust	(892)
Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS Trust	(3,844)
Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust	0
Swansea NHS Trust	(500)
Conwy and Denbighshire NHS Trust	0
North East Wales NHS Trust	0
North West Wales NHS Trust	0
Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust	1,065
TOTAL	(15,436)

Cardiology Services (Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust)

Michael German: Can the Minister indicate how much of the £2 million for cardiology treatment in the Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust has been spent and for what purposes, and can the Minister also indicate when she expects the total amount to have been spent? (WAQ28597)

Michael German: Can the Minister make a statement on her plans for cardiology service development in the Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust? (WAQ28598)

Substantive answer following holding replies issued on 10 October 2003.

Jane Hutt: The provision of cardiology services in Gwent is a matter for Health Commission Wales and the local health boards working with Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust, through the south-east Wales cardiac network.

Proposals are currently being developed for a significant expansion of angiography services across Wales, in partnership with the new opportunities fund. A total of £11.098 million is provisionally being made available with proposals being submitted to NOF by the Assembly Government, in which up to £5 million of the total funding is being sought for angiography equipment at six sites across Wales. The Royal Gwent Hospital is included in this programme of development, and has a provisional allocation of £1.730 million for angiography services. In addition to this funding, the Assembly Government has also offered Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust £530,000 to help to modernise other cardiac diagnostic services at the Royal Gwent Hospital. It is likely that the capital funding will be released to the trust during 2004-05. This funding is subject to the approval of a business case from the trust and the formal agreement of the new opportunities fund.

Designated Stroke Units

David Melding: How many district general hospitals in Wales have a designated stroke unit, and will the Minister make a statement? (WAQ28802)

Jane Hutt: The provision of effective stroke services in Wales is a very important issue. The Royal College of Physicians' National Sentinel Stroke Audit 2001-02 was carried out in Wales between 1 April 2001 and 30 June 2001. In Wales, 17 sites took part, of which 11 sites reported that they had a stroke unit in their trust. The national service framework for older people in Wales will focus on stroke care and will help to reduce any unacceptable variation in service and drive up quality. We have asked trusts and local health boards to put in place integrated care pathways, by March 2004, to ensure that there are consistent measures wherever you live in Wales for the prevention and management of strokes.

Tackling Delayed Transfers of Care

Lynne Neagle: Will the Minister provide a breakdown, by local health board area, of the £4 million announced, following the publication of the Wanless report, for tackling delayed transfers of care? (WAQ28819)

Jane Hutt: Nearly £2.7 million has already been allocated for specific projects, and the remaining £1.3 million will be allocated shortly. Full details of the allocations will be placed in the Library.

Diabetes and Endocrinology Consultants

Jocelyn Davies: Will the Minister respond to the recommendation of the Advisory Sub-Committee of Medicine to the Welsh Medical Committee that an increase from the current total of 32 consultants in diabetes and endocrinology in Wales to a total of around 53 will be needed by 2005 to fully implement the diabetes national strategic framework? (WAQ28975)

Jane Hutt: Local health boards, in partnership with the local diabetes service advisory groups and patient reference groups, are in the process of developing their implementation plans for the diabetes national service framework delivery strategy. Workforce planning issues are being addressed as part of this process. We are aware that there is a shortage of consultants in diabetes and endocrinology, and a more accurate picture of our needs will be available when the workforce plans have been received and analysed.

Staff Numbers

Jonathan Morgan: Will the Minister provide information on (i) the number of full-time and part-time members of staff in her department in 1999, and (ii) the number of full-time and part-time members of staff in her department at present? (WAQ29020)

Jane Hutt: The total number of full time-equivalent civil servants employed by the National Assembly for Wales within groups relating to the health and social services functions at its inception in May 1999 was 359. The total number as of 10 October is 740, and 438 permanent posts are in respect of functions transferred into these groups over the period 1999 to 2003.

Care Home Beds

Jonathan Morgan: What is the number of care home beds in Wales compared with 1999? (WAQ29021)

Jane Hutt: The total number of care home places in residential and nursing homes at 31 March 1999 reported by local and health authorities was 29,041. This figure excludes places in homes with fewer than four beds. Some dual-registered homes may be counted under both residential and nursing categories.

At 10 October 2003, the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales had 27,972 places registered in adult care homes in Wales. This figure will include places in homes with fewer than four beds.

Care Homes

Jonathan Morgan: What is the number of care homes in Wales compared with 1999? (WAQ29022)

Jane Hutt: The total number of residential and nursing homes at 31 March 1999 reported by local and health authorities was 1,355. This figure excludes homes with fewer than four beds. Some dual-registered homes may be counted under both residential and nursing categories.

At 10 October 2003, the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales had a total of 1,451 adult care homes registered. This figure includes homes with fewer than four beds.

The Immunisation of Children

William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on the decline in numbers of children who do not complete a primary course of immunisation? (WAQ29036)

Jane Hutt: The primary course of immunisation provides the earliest possible protection against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, haemophilus influenzae type B, meningitis C and polio, with three doses given to children at two, three and four months of age. The National Public Health Service for Wales undertakes the surveillance of immunisation levels and it reports that take-up across Wales remains stable, at between 91 and 95 per cent, as shown in the table below:

	Diphtheria %	Tetanus %	Pertussis %	HIB %	Men. C %	Polio %
April to June 2003	93.3	93.0	92.1	93.1	93.0	93.3
January to March 2003	93.6	93.0	92.0	93.4	93.3	93.7
October to December 2002	93.6	93.5	92.4	93.3	93.4	93.6
July to September 2002	92.9	92.9	91.7	92.5	92.5	92.9
April to June 2002	93.5	93.6	92.6	93.1	93.7	93.6
January to March 2002	93.8	93.9	93.0	93.6	93.0	93.8

We cannot be complacent about immunisation take-up levels, and our efforts will continue to be focused on ensuring that good quality information about childhood immunisation is easily available to local health professionals responsible for immunising children.

Cardiff Royal Infirmary

Jenny Randerson: What discussions has the Minister had with the owners of the lease on land currently occupied by Cardiff Royal Infirmary? (WAQ29037)

Jane Hutt: I refer you to the answer that I gave on 25 July to WAQ27570, WAQ27571 and WAQ27573.

Disabled People

Lorraine Barrett: What action is the Welsh Assembly Government taking to help disabled people to stay in their own homes? (WAQ29038)

Jane Hutt: Local authorities and local health services have the main responsibility for meeting the assessed needs of people to maintain their independence. We are introducing measures to facilitate this, including the new unified assessment process to care management, to ensure that the potential risks to a disabled person's independence are comprehensively assessed and managed, and new fair access to care service guidance, which will help to ensure that eligibility criteria are fair, consistent and that increased emphasis is placed upon prevention and re-ablement. In line with our manifesto commitment, we are working to providing free home care for disabled people.

GPs' Out-of-Hours Services

David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on general practitioners' out-of-hours services? (WAQ29039)

Jane Hutt: It is currently the responsibility of GPs to organise out-of-hours cover for their patients, and they have an obligation to ensure that patients have access to, and receive, adequate medical services. GPs may choose to discharge this obligation through arrangements with alternative providers, such as commercial deputising services or GP co-operatives.

Under the new general medical services contract, from 31 December 2004, this obligation will transfer to local health boards, which will become responsible for commissioning and, where necessary, providing the out-of-hours service. Under the new arrangements, the out-of-hours period is defined as 6.30 p.m. to 8 a.m. weekdays, and the whole of weekends, bank holidays and public holidays.

Ambulance Response Times

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on ambulance response times in mid Wales? (WAQ29040)

Jane Hutt: Latest published statistics (for the quarter ending 30 June 2003) for the performance of the emergency ambulance service show that 47.4 per cent of first responses to category A (immediately life threatening) calls arrived within eight minutes in Powys and 41.4 per cent in Ceredigion. This is an increase in performance on the quarter ending 30 June 2002 (46.9 per cent and 38.8 per cent respectively).

The quarterly statistics also show that 86 per cent of responses to all emergency calls in Powys, and 84 per cent in Ceredigion, arrive within the target times. For urgent journeys, 76 per cent of journeys in Powys, and 89 per cent in Ceredigion, arrive not more than 15 minutes later than the requested arrival time.

The number of emergency calls received across Wales increased by 33 per cent in 2002-03 compared with 1999-2000. Figures for the number of emergency calls received in Powys and Ceredigion in June 2003 show an increase of around 40 per cent, compared with June 2000 figures. Improving performance in the face of such increasing demand presents a real challenge for the ambulance service in Wales.

The additional investment of £2.5 million, which the Welsh Assembly Government has made available to the emergency ambulance service this financial year, has been targeted at the lowest performing areas. It is also helping to achieve the priority target, set out in the service and financial framework, for 60 per cent of responses to category A (immediately life threatening) calls across Wales to arrive within eight minutes by March 2004. This will be a milestone towards achieving the national target of 75 per cent.

The Provision of Digital Hearing Aids (Gwent)

Rosemary Butler: Will the Minister give an update on the provision of digital hearing aids in Gwent? (WAQ29041)

Jane Hutt: During the period 16 July to 21 September 2003, 1,264 digital hearing aids were fitted to patients in Gwent. Of these, 393 were fitted to new users and 871 to existing analogue users.

The Abolition of Prescription Charges

Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the benefits that the abolition of prescription charges will offer the people of Wales? (WAQ29042)

Jane Hutt: The current list of exempt conditions is inconsistent and incomplete, and the method of applying the rules is equally unfair. Evidence has demonstrated that prescription charges do deter people from asking for national health service prescriptions and from having their prescription dispensed, either in part or in its entirety. If patients cannot afford the medicines that they need to treat their condition, the long-term costs to the NHS could be far greater in terms of avoidable hospital treatment.

The Provision of Digital Hearing Aids (Wales)

Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of digital hearing aids in Wales? (WAQ29043)

Jane Hutt: During the period 16 July to 21 September 2003, 4,950 digital hearing aids were fitted to patients in Wales. Of these, 2,176 were fitted to new users and 2,774 to existing analogue users.

A total of £2.414 million has been allocated to local health boards for 2003-04 to purchase digital hearing aids and to recruit audiologists in trusts to cope with the increased demand for audiology services. There is a recognised nationwide shortage of trained audiologists and recruitment has thus been difficult. To combat this, the Assembly is providing funding for up to 13 graduates to pursue a fast-track audiology training programme. These students are being recruited by trusts and will qualify in 2004 and 2005, as opposed to the current four-year training period.

The Treatment of Head Lice

Gwenda Thomas: Would the Minister make a statement on the recent advice issued by the National Public Health Service for Wales on the treatment of head lice? (WAQ29044)

Jane Hutt: The Assembly commissioned the National Public Health Service for Wales, in collaboration with Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, to undertake a research project entitled, 'Insecticide Resistance in Head Lice: A Survey of Welsh Schools', which will consider the following areas:

- ascertaining the actual levels of prevalence of head lice;
- measuring the levels of insecticide resistance in head lice, if any;
- identifying the biological mechanisms underlying insecticide resistance in head lice; and
- comparing the characteristics and organisations of schools with differing levels of insecticide resistance, in order to identify factors important in the emergence of insecticide resistance.

The report is due to be published in the near future, although it has received press coverage in advance of publication. Discussions are already taking place, which will consider carefully whether any changes in policy need to be implemented. Once those discussions are concluded, information will be disseminated widely.

The New Tenby Hospital

Helen Mary Jones: Which areas will be served by the new Tenby hospital? (WAQ29045)

Jane Hutt: The proposals for the renewal of services currently at Tenby Cottage Hospital envisage serving the area of south-east Pembrokeshire, encompassing the locality surrounding Tenby, Saundersfoot and Narberth. The full business case has recently been completed and forwarded to the Welsh Assembly Government. It will be considered by the Assembly's capital investment board, chaired by Ann Lloyd, the director of the NHS in Wales, and she will make a recommendation to me.

Clinical Oncology (Swansea NHS Trust)

Peter Black: What discussions has the Minister had with Swansea NHS Trust about clinical oncology provision in its area? (WAQ29046)

Jane Hutt: The provision of oncology services is a matter for Health Commission Wales and local health boards to consider in their commissioning plans, working in partnership with the cancer service networks and their local trusts.

The New Tenby Hospital Site

Helen Mary Jones: From whom was the new Tenby hospital site purchased? (WAQ29047)

Helen Mary Jones: What was the cost to the Assembly of the new Tenby hospital site? (WAQ29048)

Jane Hutt: The site purchase is yet to be completed. The site consists of two lots, the main lot being owned by Secondsite Property Holdings Ltd and an adjacent smaller plot owned by Pembrokeshire County Council. When completed, the cost to the Welsh Assembly Government for the site purchase(s) will be as follows:

	£
Main site	550,000.00
VAT on main site	96,250.00
Garages site	120,000.00
Total	766,250.00

The above total excludes internal trust costs and associated external professional fees.

Budgets for New GP Buildings

Leighton Andrews: Will the Minister make a statement on whether budgets for new GP buildings will be held by the Assembly or at local health board level? (WAQ29056)

Jane Hutt: A project board has been set up to take forward the implementation process for the general medical services contract. The premises sub-group, which is one of the nine sub-groups set up by the project board, is considering detailed arrangements on how premises budgets will be handled.

A Desirable GP-to-Patient Ratio

Leighton Andrews: What is the Minister's judgment of what would constitute a desirable GP-to-patient ratio? (WAQ29058)

Jane Hutt: I do not consider there to be an ideal GP-to-patient ratio. This will vary according to circumstances. For example, GPs in rural areas will usually have smaller lists than urban GPs. The Medical Vacancies Committee, which determines vacancies in Wales, will usually approve an additional

doctor if the resulting list size is fairly near to the average per whole-time equivalent in Wales. At 30 September 2002, the average list size per whole-time equivalent was 1,842.

Meetings with LHB and Trust Chairs

Jonathan Morgan: How many meetings has the Minister held since April 2002 with (a) local health board chairs, individually and as a group, and (b) trust chairs, individually and as a group? (WAQ29059)

Jane Hutt: I regard regular discussions with chairs as an essential part of my communication with the service. Prior to restructuring the NHS in Wales on 1 April 2003, I met with chairs of the (then) health authorities and NHS trusts on a quarterly basis.

I now intend to structure my regular meetings as follows:

- I will have joint meetings on two occasions per year with local health board chairs and trust chairs. My desire would be to arrange these meetings so that they coincide, as far as is possible, with the twice-yearly chief executives conferences, led by the director, NHS Wales.
- In addition, there will be joint meetings on a twice-yearly basis with local authority leaders and local health board chairs.
- Each regional director will facilitate chairs' meetings within their own area, and I wish to attend these meetings from time to time to consider local issues as appropriate.
- In order to support local health boards' chairs in their new role, I held my first official meeting with them collectively on 4 June 2003 and a second meeting on 18 September. These arrangements will now be replaced by the arrangements above.

There are occasions when I meet chairs on an individual basis from time to time, when this is appropriate.

Cardiac Services in Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust

Michael German: Can the Minister explain why the £2 million announced for cardiac services in Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust in the late 2002 has been reduced to £750,000, and where has the remaining £1.25 million been reallocated? (WAQ29060)

Jane Hutt: The provision of cardiology services in Gwent is a matter for Health Commission Wales and the local health boards working with Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust, through the south-east Wales cardiac network.

Proposals are currently being developed for a significant expansion of angiography services across Wales, in partnership with the new opportunities fund. A total of £11.098 million is provisionally being made available with proposals being submitted to NOF by the Assembly Government, in which up to £5 million of the total funding is being sought for angiography equipment at six sites across Wales. The Royal Gwent Hospital is included in this programme of development, and has a provisional allocation of £1.730 million for angiography services. In addition to this funding, the Assembly Government has also offered Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust £530,000 to help to modernise other cardiac diagnostic services at the Royal Gwent Hospital. It is likely that the capital funding will be released to the trust during 2004-05. This funding is subject to the approval of a business case from the trust and the formal agreement of the new opportunities fund.

Reporting Cases of Clinical Negligence (Limitations)

Helen Mary Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the legal requirement for the length of time available for an individual to report a case of clinical negligence? (WAQ29074)

Jane Hutt: The limitation period for bringing a claim in respect of a clinical negligence action is set out in the Limitation Act 1980. This states that a person has to issue a claim form at court to protect his/her

claim within three years of the date of the allegedly negligent treatment, or within three years of the date of knowledge of the allegedly negligent treatment.

However, if an injured person dies before the expiration of the limitation period then, pursuant to the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1934, the limitation period for the benefit of his/her estate shall be three years from the date of death or the date of the personal representative's knowledge, whichever is the later.

Special rules apply to children and 'persons under a disability'. Limitation does not start to run for children until they reach the age of 18, and they have until the day before their twenty-first birthday to issue proceedings at court to protect the claim.

Persons under a disability are defined as persons who, by reason of mental impairment, are incapable of understanding proceedings. There are no limitation periods in respect of such persons, and they may bring a claim at any time.

A claimant may make an application to the court to disapply a limitation period in a clinical negligence case. The court can, at its discretion, allow a claim to proceed if it believes that it would be equitable to do so notwithstanding the fact that the limitation period has expired.

New Tenby Hospital

David Lloyd: How has the Minister taken into account the wishes of the people of Tenby, voiced in 2,500 letters and public meetings, as well as the views of local politicians, in making her decision regarding the new Tenby hospital? (WAQ29079) [R]

Jane Hutt: I recently met with a delegation of local people to listen to their concerns. Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS Trust has also considered public views in its preparation of the full business case and the trust board, the local health board and the community health council also support its views. The Assembly Government's capital and investment board, chaired by the NHS Wales director, Ann Lloyd, will now consider the business case, and will then make recommendations to me.

Chairs of the Local Health Boards

Jonathan Morgan: When did the Minister last meet with the chairs of the local health boards as a group? (WAQ29113)

Jane Hutt: I last met with local health board chairs as a group on Thursday, 18 September 2003.

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration

Community Activities Fund

Leighton Andrews: What awards has the Minister made to organisations in the Rhondda constituency from the community activities fund since August 2003? (WAQ29086)

The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (Edwina Hart): In the latest round of the community facilities and activities programme, in August 2003, I made awards to 14 organisations based in and serving Rhondda Cynon Taf. Grants totalling £696,752 over three years were approved. Seven of the organisations are in the Rhondda constituency specifically. The grants awarded were:

Clydach Vale Boys' and Girls' Club	£48,525
Pontygwaith Community Centre	£20,000
Rhondda Housing Association	£101,310

The Ark, two awards totalling	£58,680
Tonypandy Methodist Church	£55,860
Tylorstown Welfare Hall	£16,538
Young Carers Fund	£5,804
Total over three years	£306,717