

Written Questions answered between 11 and 18 May 2006

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

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

Contents

[Questions to the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport](#)

[Questions to the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks](#)

[Questions to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills](#)

[Questions to the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside](#)

[Questions to the Finance Minister](#)

[Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services](#)

[Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration](#)

Questions to the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport

Michael German: Will the Minister make a statement on the total number of playing fields in Wales?
(WAQ46819)

The Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport (Alun Pugh): The role that playing fields have in curricular and extra curricular sport and physical activity cannot be overstated as they encourage participation and assist in developing sporting success in line with the aims of ‘Climbing Higher’. However, the responsibility for these facilities remains with local authorities and information on the number of fields is not held centrally, although this issue is being considered as part of the review of ‘Technical Advice Note (Wales) 16: Sport and Recreation’, which is proceeding towards publication.

Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister make a statement on youth music provision under his portfolio?
(WAQ46820)

Alun Pugh: Over £1.2 million in funding was provided to support youth music provision in 2004-05, including youth activity through Welsh National Opera's MAX department, Welsh Amateur Music Federation and BBC National Orchestra of Wales. This includes various projects run by youth clubs, youth organisations and schools throughout Wales. The Arts Council of Wales is engaged at many levels of youth music provision, for example through the north Wales youth music forum which provides a close interface with music service providers, developing new youth music action zone projects*, alongside Youth Music Foundation and other National and British organisations.

Total funding figures for 2005-06 have not yet been finalised. I have asked the arts council to provide this information and I shall write to you in due course, once I have received this.

*Yo!Maz is the second youth music action zone project to be launched in Wales. The arts council has helped youth music to identify the areas that would benefit most from its investment. The first zone in Ynys Môn (Anglesey) was launched in July 2003. The Yo!Maz youth music zone in Merthyr Tydfil aims to develop a network of partners throughout Merthyr Tydfil in order to support and engage children and young people in a wide range of musical activities. This is aimed at developing the young people's potential as members of a regenerating community.

Youth music action zones provide high quality and diverse musical experiences for young people in the area who might otherwise lack the opportunity. Each zone is unique as they are designed to respond to the particular needs of the community they operate in. They deliver a wide range of music-making covering all music styles and genres. Activities include workshops, rehearsals, performances, one-to-one teaching and mentoring.

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on his policies for promoting the Welsh culture abroad? (WAQ46822)

Alun Pugh: I refer you to the answer I gave you to WAQ46344 on 23 March 2006.

Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister make a statement on public sports facilities in Wales? (WAQ46823)

Alun Pugh: Wales is well served by public sports facilities. We currently have over 725 public sports facilities, including sports halls, swimming pools, squash courts and artificial turf pitches.

Lottery funding continues to improve sporting facilities for young people and communities across Wales, through programmes including the Big Lottery Fund's physical education and school sport

programme, which aims to build new and to modernise existing sporting facilities in schools across Wales for school and community use. The latest example is the joint school/community facility at Ysgol y Creuddyn, Bae Penrhyn, Llandudno, which will be officially opened in June by the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement on the new formation of his department? (WAQ46824)

Alun Pugh: There is no change or 'new formation' in relation to the culture portfolio. The names of Assembly departments were announced on 1 April as part of the Assembly sponsored public body mergers taking place. The three culture divisions are part of the Department for Local Government and Culture.

Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement on the ASPBs within his portfolio that will be merged with the Assembly Government? (WAQ46825)

Alun Pugh: The Welsh Language Board will merge with the Assembly Government in April 2007 following due process, including the agreement of the Assembly to a motion that we shall bring forward in the usual way.

Laura Anne Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on what is being done to encourage take up of cricket this summer? (WAQ46826)

Alun Pugh: Our Sports Council for Wales is working with the Cricket Board of Wales to ensure that funding is distributed to support the development of the game across Wales, from grass roots to elite level. This year nearly £330,000 is being invested in the sport of cricket which is an increase of over 20 per cent from last year. This funding is aimed at creating opportunities for young people to play cricket in schools and to also support regional centres of excellence.

Karen Sinclair: What recent discussions has the Minister had regarding football funding in Wales? (WAQ46827)

Alun Pugh: I will soon be meeting with representatives from the Football Association for Wales to discuss a range of issues, including football funding in Wales.

William Graham: Will the Minister outline how the 'Get Hooked on Fishing' programme will be implemented in Wales? (WAQ46828)

Alun Pugh: I am aware of the UK Government backed charity programme 'Get Hooked on Fishing', which aims to divert youths away from a potential life of drugs and crime.

The Welsh Assembly Government supports the aims of the scheme through funding of its sustainable fisheries programme, managed by Environment Agency Wales. One of the objectives of this programme is working with angling clubs and bodies to encourage angling participation. Since its inception in 2002, over 9,000 individuals have been introduced to angling. In addition to participation events organised by the agency, angling clubs that wish to organise their own events are also supported.

William Graham: How will the Minister use the football World Cup tournament to promote sport activities in Wales? (WAQ46829)

Alun Pugh: Football is an immensely popular game enjoyed by many people of all ages in Wales. The World Cup tournament is one of the world's biggest sporting events and I am sure it will inspire many young people to become involved in sport, particularly football.

Our Sports Council for Wales is continuing to work closely with key partners in Wales in developing opportunities for more people of all ages to participate in sport and physical activity. This is of course one of the key aims behind my sport and physical activity strategy, 'Climbing Higher'.

Carl Sargeant: Will the Minister make a statement on the coaching Wales scheme? (WAQ46830)

Alun Pugh: The Welsh Assembly Government coaching plan for Wales provides a new direction for the Sports Council for Wales, as it makes a clear statement about the importance of coaching across all its work in sport.

Coaching, teaching and leadership play a vital part in ensuring that young people are attracted into sport and remain as participants. Local community sports clubs and governing bodies with high participation have a healthy coaching culture, where the coach is highly valued. The recruitment, training, qualification and retention of coaches are very important in the creation of a positive sports environment. The coaching plan for Wales has two key aims, to:

increase the number of coaches, leaders and instructors, both voluntary and professional;

improve the quality of coaching in Wales by increasing opportunities for education, training and qualification.

A coaching website has been established, which is www.coachingwales.com

The simple message is one of creating more and better coaches, which leads to more participation/membership and improved performances.

Carl Sargeant: Will the Minister make a statement on library usage in Alyn and Deeside? (WAQ46831)

Alun Pugh: Nine of Flintshire's 16 community libraries lie within the Alyn and Deeside area. They range in opening hours from 13.5 to 49 hours per week. Across the nine libraries, use in three key areas of activity in 2005-06 compared with 2004-05 is recorded as follows:

	2004-05	2005-06	% increase
Visitors	248,635	281,369	+13%
Loans	266,783	291,236	+9%
Computer uses	21,256	27,277	+28%

The above information was supplied by Flintshire Library and Information Service.

Questions to the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister update us on the Welsh Assembly Government's policies for promoting innovation in Wales? (WAQ46799)

The Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks (Andrew Davies): 'Wales: A Vibrant Economy' restates the broad action areas in 'Wales for Innovation'—communicating innovation, focusing on growth, skills for innovation, supporting innovators, and making the most of higher education and further education to support business innovation. Numerous activities under the five

strands are going forward—such as the Knowledge Bank for Business, technium CAST, the Institute of Life Science at Swansea, the centres of excellence HE programme, and a streamlined SmartCymru.

Michael German: Did the Welsh Development Agency intend to make a planning appeal against the decision by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council on 4 November 2005 on its Mwyndy Cross application, or does the new department have any such plans? (WAQ46841)

Andrew Davies: The former WDA, now the Department for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks does not intend to submit an appeal against Rhondda Cynon Taf on the Mwyndy Cross planning application.

David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on the number of workers from Wales employed in the construction of the 128 km liquefied natural gas pipeline from Milford Haven to Aberdulais? (WAQ46851)

Andrew Davies: The Milford Haven to Aberdulais pipeline is the first part of a two stage project which will provide new high pressure gas lines from Milford Haven to Tirley in Gloucestershire. National Grid says it is committed to filling as many as possible of the pipeline construction jobs with personnel recruited locally. It is anticipated that 1,000 people will be employed in constructing the new high-pressure gas lines across South Wales. National Grid expect between 600 to 700 will be recruited within Wales. It is inevitable that the project will require a significant number of specialist skills, some of which will have to be recruited from beyond south Wales. The project will however offer training opportunities for skilled workers.

Questions to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Janet Davies: Will the Minister give an update on the progress of the school transport plans as the free breakfasts are rolled out? (WAQ46838)

The Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Davidson): Our guidance on the primary school breakfast initiative makes clear that where its introduction has implications for children entitled to free school transport, the school should discuss those in the first instance with the relevant local authority which is responsible for such transport. In turn we have said that where authorities can demonstrate that the initiative has involved additional, unavoidable free transport costs we would be prepared to consider meeting those as part of the wider costs of implementing the initiative. We would, though, expect such demands to be exceptional rather than the norm.

Jenny Randerson: Has the Minister had any meetings or discussions with the Association of University Teachers or National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education representatives in Wales to discuss current industrial action? (WAQ46864)

Jenny Randerson: Has the Minister had any meetings, or had any written correspondence or telephone calls with the relevant Ministers in the UK Government about AUT or NATFHE industrial action over university lecturers' pay? (WAQ46865)

Jane Davidson: I discussed the dispute with Bill Rammell MP, the UK Government higher education Minister, on 12 May. I am meeting Higher Education Wales on 22 May, specifically to discuss the dispute, and I have offered to meet trade union representatives. Although the question of lecturers' pay is a matter for institutions, as autonomous bodies with sole responsibility for their own academic and administrative affairs, I hope that a solution will be agreed shortly.

Brynle Williams: Does the Minister have any plans to make personal social and health education a compulsory part of the curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds? (WAQ46866)

Jane Davidson: PSE is already a statutory part of the provision for all 14 to 16-year-olds and this will continue to be the case in the revised curriculum due for implementation in September 2009. The learning core of Learning Pathways 14-19 states that all post-16 learners should have access to personal, social, sustainability and health matters as an enhancement. For those taking the Welsh baccalaureate, PSE is a specific requirement of the qualification.

Nick Bourne: What was the cost of Education and Learning Wales Pembrokeshire pathfinder consultation exercise? (WAQ46886)

Jane Davidson: The cost of the consultation exercise was approximately £8,800. This covered the advertising and printing costs associated with the formal consultation documents and also the printing and distribution of signposting pamphlets.

Nick Bourne: What response has there been to the ELWa Pembrokeshire pathfinder consultation exercise? (WAQ46887)

Jane Davidson: Thirty-five written responses were received. These included comprehensive responses

from all partners in the project. All partners acknowledged that the status quo in Pembrokeshire was not tenable. There is no consensus view on the way forward.

Nick Bourne: Will responses to the ELWa Pembrokeshire pathfinder consultation document be published, and, if not, will the Minister consider doing so? (WAQ46888)

Jane Davidson: This consultation exercise was conducted by the National Council—ELWa. Copies of the individual consultation responses are publicly available in a pack on request to the Department of Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. A summary of the consultation responses will be published as part of an outcomes report related to the Pembrokeshire pathfinder to be published over the summer.

Carl Sargeant: Will the Minister make a statement on applications for places at universities in Wales? (WAQ46901)

Jane Davidson: Latest University and Colleges Admissions Service data show that at 24 March 2006 there were 64,851 applicants for entry in academic year 2006-07 to higher education courses in Wales—similar to the number in 2005 at the same point (64,819) and 11.2 per cent higher than in 2004 (58,300).

The number of Welsh-domiciled applicants for higher education courses in Wales for 2006-07 was 15,360: 7.3 per cent higher than in 2005 and 16.9 per cent higher than in 2004.

The number of applicants from the rest of the UK for courses in Wales was 42,416: 2.0 per cent lower than in 2005 but 9.9 per cent higher than in 2004.

Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement on the application of savings in schools in Wales identified under guidelines set down by the Gershon report? (WAQ46904)

Jane Davidson: The Assembly Government is committed to maximising value for money in order to deliver better quality services in Wales. In 'Making the Connections' we have set a target of £600 million value-for-money improvements across the Welsh public service by 2010. It is for individual local authorities to decide how best to deliver improvements across the services for which they are responsible. Schools represent a substantial part of those services.

The Assembly Government has made clear that the whole point of value for money and efficiency is to

make the best use of our resources for the benefit of front-line services. Efficiency has to come from better management of services, not cutting services to the public.

The Wales programme for improvement explains the process by which local authorities need to plan for their efficiency gains in a way that is transparent and can be appraised by the Wales Audit Office as part of their audit of authority's improvement plans. WPI guidance makes clear that efficiency gains must reflect genuine and sustainable business improvements. Simply cutting budgets allocated to third parties, including schools, will not suffice.

Where schools budgets for 2006-07 have been set on the basis of efficiency gains, local authorities have a leadership role to play in working with school heads and governors to support them to deliver those gains. We are monitoring efficiency progress with local government to ensure that they achieve improvements in efficiency and not service cuts.

The Assembly Government is helping through establishing and funding Value Wales to help all public bodies get better value from their budgets—through procurement, shared services, capital management and so on. Some significant gains are emerging which will benefit schools, for instance on collaborative procurement.

The increase in budget for Value Wales this year will allow it to run a series of regional efficiency events in 2006-07 tailored to local authorities' and schools' needs. Value Wales is discussing with the Welsh Local Government Association, local education authority and school representatives how the events can provide the maximum benefit to the sector.

Questions to the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside

Glyn Davies: What knowledge does the Assembly Government have of how long strains of highly pathogenic avian influenza remain infective in migratory birds which have not contracted the disease but are carrying it? (WAQ33359)

The Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Carwyn Jones): The role of symptomless carriers of the disease is not known.

Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the environmental impact of Network Rail's GSM-R masts? (WAQ46765)

Carwyn Jones: I understand that Network Rail are minimising the environmental impact of GSM-R masts by using a 'lattice' design mast and taking careful consideration as to the location of every mast in

consultation with the local planning authority. The masts are always located on railway land and the emission from the mast is unidirectional along the railway track only. Network Rail carefully considers the location of every mast and every effort is made to place masts in the most suitable place to minimise the environmental impact and the impact on local residents.

John Griffiths: What is the current level of risk of radioactivity in sheep (as affected by the Chernobyl disaster) contaminating the food chain in Wales? (WAQ46834) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Health and Social Services*

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Brian Gibbons): I am replying to the question asked of the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside as the responsibility for monitoring foodstuffs and the prevention of food contaminated to unacceptable levels from entering the food chain has now passed to the Food Standards Agency.

The main radionuclide responsible for the continuation of restrictions is radiocaesium -137, which is taken up by vegetation and ingested by sheep. To determine the level of radiocaesium, sheep on Chernobyl-restricted farms are subject to a live monitoring test under the mark and release scheme prior to leaving a farm for sale or slaughter. The monitors can estimate the amount of radiocaesium in the meat without having to kill the animals.

Following the Chernobyl incident, the European commission set up an expert group to consider maximum acceptable levels of radiocaesium contamination in sheep meat. It proposed an action limit of 1000 bq/kg and this was implemented in the UK with the placing of restriction orders on areas in Wales and other parts of the UK.

Animals that fail the monitoring test must be paint marked before they can be moved under movement consent. These 'failed/marked' sheep cannot be slaughtered for human consumption or for use in the preparation of foodstuffs (including pet food) until remonitoring shows they have dropped below the limit. The slaughterhouse monitoring programme never detected radiation concentrations above (or near) the 1,000 bq limit. The highest recorded was 533 bq/kg.

I am satisfied that the foodchain is properly protected. The action level is set at a very precautionary level. The Food Standards Agency is confident that the controls are fully adequate to ensure that consumers are not exposed to unacceptable levels of radioactivity.

John Griffiths: How many cases have there been, for each year since the Chernobyl disaster, of livestock in Wales exceeding the safe levels of radioactivity? (WAQ46835) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Health and Social Services.*

Brian Gibbons: I am replying to the question asked of the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside as the responsibility for monitoring foodstuffs and the prevention of food contaminated to unacceptable levels from entering the food chain has now passed to the Food Standards Agency.

Routine monitoring of sheep going to market or slaughter does not show a high level of failures. Only 585 sheep from approximately 30 farms have recorded failures over the last three years (01/01/03 to 31/12/05) and this is much less than 1 per cent of sheep. None of these sheep entered the food chain while their radiation levels were higher than 1,000 bq/kg.

Sheep that fail the test are marked with indelible paint and returned to low-level pasture where the radiation levels fall away sharply in the following weeks. They are then remonitored and if they pass the test are ear tagged to cancel the paint mark.

The historical data is as follows:

Number of sheep failing

1987	21,991
1988	8,732
1989	6,320
1990	5,015
1991	2,743
1992	1,498
1993	927
1994	917
1995	671
1996	306
1997	332
1998	374
1999	518
2000	398
2001	107
2002	195
2003	364

2004	82
2005	69

The explanation for the dramatic reduction between 1987 and 1988 could be due to a change of procedure with regard to paint marking breeding ewes (without monitoring).

Another factor may have been that it had become well known that levels reduced significantly after sheep grazed lower pasture. Farmers have adapted their procedures to take account of this.

Elin Jones: Pursuant to WAQ46710, will the Minister detail, for each year since 1999, the (i) mean average amount of compensation paid for an animal, and will he detail the (ii) median average amount of compensation paid for an animal? (WAQ46863)

Carwyn Jones: The estimated mean amount of compensation paid for an animal in the financial years 1999-2000 to 2005-06 is shown in the table below. For the financial year 2004-05 the median compensation payment was £1,400 and for the seven months of financial year 2005-06 (up to October 2006) the median compensation payment was £1,500. Information on median compensation payments for earlier financial years is not readily available.

Year	Average compensation (£)
1999-2000	789
2000-01	787
2001-02	876
2002-03	1,387
2003-04	1,657
2004-05	1,505
2005-06	2,040

Notes: The number of cattle slaughtered under TB control measures in Wales used to calculate average compensation has been taken from provisional data downloaded from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' animal health database (Vetnet) on 11 May 2006. Subject to change as more

data becomes available.

In 2001, the TB testing and control programme was largely suspended due to the foot and mouth disease outbreak. When testing resumed in 2002, resources were concentrated on herds with overdue TB tests which would have had a longer period in which to contract the disease. Also the proportion of high-risk herds tested immediately after the FMD breakdown was greater than that prior to the outbreak. As a result, data for 2001 and 2002 is not comparable with other years.

Elin Jones: Further to WAQ46710, will the Minister detail for each year since 1999 the (i) twentieth percentile, (ii) fortieth percentile, (iii) sixtieth percentile (iv) eightieth percentile amount of compensation paid for an animal under the bovine TB compensation scheme? (WAQ46883)

Carwyn Jones: The table below provides the twentieth, fortieth, sixtieth and eightieth percentile TB compensation payments for financial year 2004-05 (the latest full year available). The equivalent information for earlier financial years is not readily available.

Percentile	Compensation payment (£)
20 th	808
40 th	1,250
60 th	1,580
80 th	2,100

Laura Anne Jones: How is the Minister ensuring that local authorities are able to adequately deal with roadside litter? (WAQ46885)

Carwyn Jones: The Assembly Government has made dealing with litter a major aspect of its national waste management strategy launched in June 2002. Under this strategy, local authorities are now expected to make dealing with litter an integral part of their waste management planning.

Under section 89(b) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 local authorities are responsible for clearing litter and refuse from all highways except 'special roads' (mainly motorways) and to keep them clean. It is for local authorities to allocate the necessary resources from within their own budgets to

undertake this legal requirement. Clearance of litter on 'special roads' is arranged directly by the Assembly's Transport Wales through its agents.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 recognises the difficulty of clearing litter on highways due to congestion and road safety considerations. This work is usually done when lane closures are in place for other routine maintenance functions.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 introduces a number of additional measures which will be extremely valuable in combating littering and flytipping offences. These include:

making it an offence to drop litter anywhere, including private land and rivers, ponds and lakes;

giving local authorities new powers (litter clearing notices) to require businesses and individuals to clear litter from their land;

strengthening existing powers for local authorities to require local businesses to help clear up litter they generate;

enabling local authorities to restrict the distribution of flyers, handouts and pamphlets that can end up as litter.

Questions to the Finance Minister

Owen John Thomas: What discussions has the Minister had with the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks regarding the financial implications of the transfer of responsibility of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise to the Assembly? (WAQ46753)

The Finance Minister (Sue Essex): The implications of the transfer have been included in budget discussions with the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks and my officials have been involved in the detailed transfer negotiation with the Department of Transport and Treasury.

David Lloyd: Further to WAQ40704, will the Minister provide a progress report on revised statutory guidance provided to local authorities following the consultation regarding political balance within local government? (WAQ46879)

Sue Essex: The consultation on the revised statutory guidance for county and county borough councils

on executive and alternative arrangements has concluded, and I will be considering the responses shortly. The principle of political balance among chairs of overview and scrutiny is enshrined within the guidance and I hope to be in a position to issue the guidance in due course.

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on the effective targeting of local government funding? (WAQ46906)

Sue Essex: Local authorities are responsible for setting their own budgets. The majority of Assembly Government funding for local government is provided through the non-hypothecated revenue settlement. The delivery of outcomes funded by the settlement reflects shared strategic priorities developed through individual authority policy agreements rather than nationally prescribed amounts for different services. In addition, individual Ministers may decide to allocate specific resources to local authorities in order to deliver targeted Assembly Government policy objectives. Such specific grants should be developed in line with the grant protocol agreed between the Assembly Government and local government.

William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of local public services in south Wales? (WAQ46907)

Sue Essex: We have set out our vision for high quality, responsive public services in 'Making the Connections' published in June 2005. We have supported the delivery of those services by providing £2.127 billion (revenue support grant/non-domestic rates) of Assembly Government support to south Wales local authorities for 2006-07, an increase of 5 per cent on 2005-06.

William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on progress on the implementation of Wales programme for improvement? (WAQ46908)

Sue Essex: The Welsh Assembly Government issued revised Wales programme for improvement guidance for local authorities (Circular 28/2005) in December last year. I would expect all local authorities in Wales to follow the revised guidance from April this year.

While it is too soon to make any definitive statements on the progress that local authorities are making in implementing the revised WPI, I am optimistic that local authorities will embed the principles within the discharge of their duties under the Local Government Act 1999. This optimism is the result of the revised WPI guidance being developed by the Welsh Assembly Government working in partnership with other national bodies, such as the Welsh Local Government Association and the Wales Audit Office. It further benefited from extensive consultation with local authorities and other stakeholders,

with broad support for the changes.

It is also worth noting that the Wales Audit Office, in its recent report on the Wales programme for improvement (reporting on the 2004-05 financial year) found that the WPI framework is being applied appropriately by local authorities in Wales, and that service and corporate standards are continuing to improve. As the revised guidance builds upon existing best practice, and local authorities' experience of operating under the WPI regime, I expect local authorities to continue to use the WPI successfully in the future.

Owen John Thomas: What steps can the Minister take to ensure the funding allocated to local authorities under the revenue settlement is used for its intended purpose? (WAQ46909)

Sue Essex: Policy agreements are agreed with individual local authorities. These set out what each authority expects to achieve as its key contributions towards shared strategic priorities, over a three-year period.

Policy agreements are based on the principles that the local authority and the Welsh Assembly Government are partners, and that the local authority's decisions about how it uses its resources should be based on shared strategic priorities rather than on nationally prescribed amounts for different services. Local authorities are responsible for setting their own budgets with the majority of funding provided through the non-hypothecated local government finance settlement.

In return for making and delivering upon the agreement, the Assembly Government makes an annual non-hypothecated performance incentive grant to the authority, which the authority can deploy as it sees fit.

The policy agreements are not an imposition on local authorities as they are under no obligation to conclude an agreement, although all of them have chosen to. It is important to note that we have negotiated each target with each authority so as to reflect their circumstances and the challenges they face.

Peter Black: Will the Minister outline Welsh Assembly Government measures to support local public services in South Wales West? (WAQ46912)

Sue Essex: We have set out our vision for high quality, responsive public services in 'Making the Connections' published in June 2005. We have supported the delivery of those services by providing £1,025,743 million (revenue support grant/non-domestic rates) of Assembly Government support to south Wales local authorities for 2006-07, an increase of 5.3 per cent on 2005-06.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Lisa Francis: Will the Minister make a statement on the number of people on long term sick in Wales in each year since 1999? (WAQ41450)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Brian Gibbons): The issue of the number of people on long-term sick in Wales is the responsibility of Alan Johnson MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and has not been devolved to the Assembly.

Lisa Francis: Will the Minister make a statement on the number of people on long term sick in Mid and West Wales in each year since 1999? (WAQ41451)

Brian Gibbons: I refer you to my answer to WAQ41450.

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on his current priorities for improving the national health service in Wales? (WAQ46361)

Brian Gibbons: 'Designed for Life' sets out a new vision of improved healthcare that all the people of Wales can expect by 2015. It includes action to improve health, social care and wellbeing for all and transform services. It will focus in the first three years on improving coronary heart disease, cancer, mental health, services for older people and children, services for those with chronic diseases and awaiting elective surgery.

Jonathan Morgan: Will the Minister make a statement on the financial position of Cardiff and the Vale NHS Trust? (WAQ46808)

Brian Gibbons: The trust, currently in financial recovery has a target deficit of £1.619 million for 2005-06. Year-end monitoring returns report a £0.153 million favourable variance against this, giving a deficit for 2005-06 of £1.466 million. The trust has therefore met its statutory financial target. This is a provisional position, the final position follows audit approval of the final accounts.

Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister make a statement on the cross-border issues in the health and social services portfolio? (WAQ46809)

Brian Gibbons: Devolution has led to a natural divergence in public policy between the devolved countries, as these have sought to respond to the needs of their respective populations in their particular circumstances. In Wales, we have set different targets and priorities because Wales has a different range of problems and mix of resources. We must, therefore, take a different approach to put into place the capacity and systems that we need.

This does not prevent Welsh and English health service commissioners from choosing to use services at hospitals across the border. However, it remains the responsibility of Welsh commissioners, including local health boards and Health Commission Wales, to ensure that Welsh patients are treated within the maximum waiting time targets that I have set or such shorter times that they may agree for their patients.

On 4 February 2005 the Assembly issued Welsh health circular (2005)12: 'Procedure for Cross-Border Healthcare Commissioning between England and Wales'. This protocol, initially for one year up to 31 March 2006, provided that for English residents registered with a GP in Wales, the legal responsibility would remain with the primary care trust but the commissioning responsibility would rest with the local health board (on behalf of the PCT). The same principle applies for Welsh residents registered with an English GP, but in reverse. This protocol applies only to those LHBs and PCTs on the border (these are listed in the document).

The protocol has now been extended for another year, and a further WHC has been issued to the service following ministerial approval.

William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on the function of Health Commission Wales? (WAQ46810)

Brian Gibbons: Health Commission Wales (Specialist Services) has been tasked with commissioning an agreed range of specialist, tertiary and national services on an all-Wales basis since 1 April 2003. A list of the relevant services was published with WHC (2003)63, 'NHS Planning and Commissioning Guidance' in 2003. The range and nature of services commissioned by HCW may be modified from time to time based on experience and/or changing needs.

In order to ensure appropriate patient flows and the most effective use of scarce resources commissioners within HCW work in close collaboration with the secondary care commissioning groupings and local health boards to ensure effective operational and strategic interface. HCW's chief executive is advised by a national commissioning advisory board which has wide user, clinical, provider and LHB representation. Its key role is to approve and monitor the delivery of HCW's commissioning plan.

Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement on the financial position of LHBs? (WAQ46814)

Brian Gibbons: The latest financial position reported to the end of March 2006 indicates that, with the exception of Powys (reported overspend £0.411 million), Swansea (reported overspend £3.768 million) and Ceredigion (reported overspend £0.600 million), all local health boards have kept their spending within approved spending limits in 2005-06.

The three LHBs who are currently reporting that they have not done this in 2005-06 are currently preparing strategic change and efficiency plans to repay any potential 2005-06 resource overspends in future years.

Laura Anne Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on access to GP surgeries in Wales? (WAQ46816)

Brian Gibbons: A new access directed enhanced service has been negotiated as part of the 2006-07 GMS contract. The directed enhanced service builds on work that has been undertaken in last two years and develops access to meet the needs of patients. The new directed enhanced service comprises three parts.

Part 1 requires practices to plan for and deliver the following:

access to an appropriate member of the primary care team within 24 hours (not necessarily a doctor);

the ability to pre book an appointment up to two weeks in advance;

the ability to see a GP of choice within four weeks (subject to leave, sickness, training);

a telephone system that is able to cope with reasonable patient demand.

Part 2 incentivises practices to undertake a patient experience survey, analyse the results and submit a report on the findings to the LHB.

Part 3 incentivises practices to address the needs of patients with disabilities in accessing services. Practices will have to review the arrangements they have in place and submit a report to the LHB.

Karen Sinclair: Will the Minister give a progress report on the Welsh Assembly Government's policy of abolishing prescription charges in Wales? (WAQ46817)

Brian Gibbons: Prescription charges have halved under this government and at £3 are now less than half of what they are in England. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to removing all prescription charges by April 2007. This policy is straight forward and effective, benefiting everyone including the chronically ill and the low paid. It is a policy unique to Wales, reducing inequalities and promoting good health, supporting self care and tackling the problems of poverty and low income. It underlines the Assembly's commitment to providing the best possible access to healthcare for the people of Wales.

Helen Mary Jones: What was the projected cost of transferring responsibility for GP out-of-hours services to LHBs, and what reviews have been undertaken to assess the accuracy of this projection? (WAQ46832)

Brian Gibbons: The total projected cost of providing out-of-hours services for Wales was £28.5 million per annum. This was based on estimates made as part of negotiations on the new general medical services contract in 2002-03. When responsibility was transferred to LHBs in December 2004, services were redesigned and costs increased as a result of changes in the market for general medical services. The cost of the service varies with local circumstances and according to the model that is commissioned by individual LHBs. Since the services have been introduced a number of LHBs have made further revisions to the service that will have affected the original cost base. Additionally, most LHBs included within the commissioning of GMS out-of-hours services other elements such as cover for community hospitals, which would be funded from other sources. As a consequence, it is not possible to compare current costs with 2002-03 estimates or funding.

Jenny Randerson: Are there any plans to evaluate the workload of GPs due to patients attending GP surgeries to get over the counter medicines that would be cheaper on prescription? (WAQ46833)

Brian Gibbons: There is no evidence to suggest the reduction in prescription charges has increased GP workload. Consideration of workload is an important part of the GMS contract review process, undertaken by LHBs. LHBs as the commissioners of primary care services have various options available for dealing with new workload. The new pharmacy contract includes the provision for enhanced services to be commissioned. A standard specification for a directed enhanced service for minor ailments has been agreed as part of the national contract.

Carl Sargeant: Will the Minister make a statement on what the Assembly is doing to help people who self harm? (WAQ46842)

Brian Gibbons: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence and the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health have published a guideline for the NHS in England and Wales on the care of people who self harm. We welcome the guidelines and we expect services to consider their conclusions as with any other set of guidelines.

The national service framework for mental health has a key action relating to liaison psychiatry services and NHS trusts have been developing such services in several district general hospital units across Wales.

Carl Sargeant: Will the Minister make a statement on what safeguards are in place to ensure that medical records are not lost during transfer from one medical establishment to another? (WAQ46843)

Brian Gibbons: All NHS records are public records under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958 section 3(1) to section 3(2). Chief executives and senior managers of all NHS organisations are personally accountable for records management within their organisation and have a duty to make arrangements for the safe-keeping of those records under the overall supervision of the Keeper of Public Records.

The Assembly Government ensures the safeguarding of patient records by mandating the efficient management of patient records as set out in WHC (2000)71.

The circular sets out the legal obligations for NHS bodies to keep comprehensive records and explains the actions needed from chief executives and managers to fulfil these obligations which include:

NHS organisations to draw up a records management strategy;

Each NHS organisation should identify a specific senior manager responsible for co-ordinating, publicising and monitoring implementation of the records management strategy. The details of the named manager to be held by the Assembly;

NHS trusts and LHBs to develop action plans for effective records management services for all staff groups, record types and media;

Records management services and controls are to be included in NHS trust

and LHB information management and technology strategies.

Since October 2003 NHS trusts have participated in an accreditation and development of health records programme. ARD is a national UK programme devised to provide continuous organisational development for health records services. The accreditation is awarded by an independent body.

The content of the standards are subject to annual review by the accreditation and development of health records programme board. An organisations accreditation against the standards is reviewed on a one, two or three yearly basis, at the recommendation of the board for the accreditation and development of health records programme.

General practitioners' patient medical records are created by the NHS when a patient is first registered with a GP.

Records are forwarded to GP practices by the Business Services Centre Wales on behalf of LHBs. Similar arrangements apply in the rest of the UK. The location of GP patient medical records are monitored by the Business Services Centre.

When a patient changes GP to a new location anywhere in the UK, the NHS computer systems monitoring patient registrations notifies the former GP of the change in circumstances and requests return of the record to BSC or its equivalents elsewhere. It is practice in Wales, and believed to be the case elsewhere, that secure local contract courier services are used to return records. In turn, secure national contract courier services are used to transfer between NHS bodies dealing with GP services.

There are other circumstances where a record may be requested for return to BSC—death, embarkation, armed forces service, imprisonment, long-term hospitalisation.

All records returned to BSC which are not being sent on to a new GP are retained in secure locations for periods specified for retention by the Assembly.

If a practice has computerised records, they are required to print off details to go in the physical record when patients move from such a practice.

In some circumstances, for example, the need for urgent sight of a medical record by a new GP, BSC will make an urgent request of a practice to send the record immediately to the BSC by secure post for BSC to send out direct to the new area—this meets a requirement that such records are transferred within 48 hours.

In every case of requests for return of a record, a marker is set to ensure return of the record, equally a marker is also used to record the initial supply or transfer of a record to a GP or other NHS body dealing with GP services.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will the Minister detail the number of transfer patients undergo when placed in psychiatric inpatient care, and what reasons are given for those transfers? (WAQ46849)

Brian Gibbons: This information is not centrally held.

Jenny Randerson: Will the Minister provide a detailed breakdown of from where within the health and social services main expenditure group the £12.4 million of the final funding recently announced for dentistry came from? (WAQ46850)

Brian Gibbons: The £12.4 million of the final funding recently announced for dentistry has been secured from savings made elsewhere within the health and social services main expenditure group.

David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on the percentage of children in foster care in Wales, and what assessment has he made of how this compares to the situation in England? (WAQ46852)

Brian Gibbons: As at March 2005 in England, I understand that 68 per cent of looked-after children were cared for by foster carers.

At the same time, 73 per cent of the children in Wales in public care were looked after by foster carers, who provide the security and comfort of a family home for some of the most vulnerable children in our society.

I am pleased that in Wales we are able to offer such a high percentage of child placements with a foster family, as fostering offers children the chance to experience family life.

Under existing regulations the recruitment of foster carers is a local authority responsibility. As at March 2005 there were a total of 1,891 approved foster carers on local authority registers and 3,370 places specified in respect of these approvals.

The Assembly Government's Children First programme has set the policy context for improvements in services to children looked after by local authorities. One of the key priorities for the use of the funds is in developing placements locally, including foster placements, to improve choice and stability to meet children's needs.

Leanne Wood: Will the Minister publish guidance issued to GPs about prescribing Sativex for sufferers of multiple sclerosis? (WAQ46856)

Leanne Wood: Will the Minister make a statement on the access of multiple sclerosis sufferers to Sativex? (WAQ46857)

Leanne Wood: Will the Minister list the local health boards that permit Sativex to be prescribed? (WAQ46858)

Brian Gibbons: Sativex is a cannabis-based drug which the Medicine and Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority have not licensed for use in the UK. It can only be used in the UK on a named-patient basis with total responsibility being accepted by the prescribing clinician. It is unlikely that local health boards would recommend the prescribing of an unlicensed product of this nature, particularly as trials carried out in the UK did not produce the evidence required to enable the product to be licensed.

Jenny Randerson: Will the Minister provide details of the amount spent on the community dental service in each NHS trust area in 2005-06? (WAQ46860)

Brian Gibbons: This information is not held centrally. The salaried dentists who are employed under the community dental service are employees of the NHS trusts and therefore their costs are amongst the general allocations issued to the local health boards.

From 1 April there has been a substantial investment of an additional £30 million in NHS dentistry from 2006-07 and is supporting LHBs and the introduction of local commissioning. This gives LHBs increasing control about how NHS dental services are developed to meet local needs. The involvement of the CDS in providing additional dental services is currently being developed through LHB partnership in a number of areas.

Jenny Randerson: Is the all-Wales medicines strategy group considering the breast cancer drug Femara for approval in Wales? (WAQ46861)

Brian Gibbons: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence is currently reviewing the use of Femara and is due to publish its findings in November 2006. The all-Wales medicines strategy group will therefore not be appraising this drug.

The AWMSG appraisals programme can be viewed on the AWMSG website: www.wales.nhs.uk/awmsg/

Eleanor Burnham: What date will the Minister announce the results of the review on fair charging for care for the elderly disabled? (WAQ46862)

Brian Gibbons: My statement of 15 February this year said that we will continue to keep domiciliary care charging under review and to make reforms when there is an opportunity and as we can afford to do so. My specific proposals for change were to increase the margin above income support levels before local authority charging for personal care at home takes effect, and further work on the treatment of disability related expenditure in domiciliary care charging. A stakeholder group to consider these two issues will hold its first meeting shortly. I am asking them to report to me before the end of the year.

Jonathan Morgan: How many hospital appointments have been missed in Wales in the last year and will the Minister give an annual breakdown dating back over the last five years? (WAQ46870)

Jonathan Morgan: What assessment has been made of the cost of missed appointments in NHS Wales, and will he give details of those costs? (WAQ46869)

Brian Gibbons: The information is given in the following table:

Missed hospital appointments

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
New out-patient appointments:					
Number not kept	1,054	987	711	1,089	1,108
Per cent of appointments not kept	7.9	7.9	6.1	7.4	7.7
Total out-patient appointments:					
Number not kept	3,836	3,544	3,035	3,145	3,407
Per cent of appointments not kept	9.1	8.9	8.0	8.3	9.1
	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05

Estimated average cost of an out-patient attendance	£100	£106	£117	£122	£115
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The issue of missed appointments has been recognised as an operational issue and has been addressed in the annual priorities and planning guidance for the service and financial frameworks 2006-07. The guidance requires all organisations to achieve a reduction in did not attend rates in all specialities (excluding mental health) to 5 per cent. No assessment of the costs of did not attend rates has been made for two reasons: in operational terms, overbooking of appointments means that there is little, if any, wastage and the average costs above will include some element of did not attend which means the costs would be unreliable as an estimate of the cost of missed appointments.

Owen John Thomas: What steps is the Welsh Assembly Government taking to help arthritis sufferers in Wales? (WAQ46872)

Brian Gibbons: The Welsh Assembly Government is taking steps to help improve the health and well-being of people with arthritis and chronic musculoskeletal conditions. The service development and commissioning directives for arthritis and chronic musculoskeletal conditions were issued earlier this week for consultation. This work is in line with the key objectives of 'Designed for Life'.

It focuses on improving the multi-disciplinary approach to care across the care pathway by focusing on prevention, assessment and diagnosis, treatment and management and the facilitation of independence.

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on the Welsh Assembly Government's policies for improving the health service? (WAQ46873)

Brian Gibbons: I refer you to my answer to your previous question on this subject WAQ46361, which was tabled for answer on 23 March 2006.

Jonathan Morgan: Will the Minister confirm whether NHS Wales will suffer nurse redundancies as a result of the current financial situation? (WAQ46875)

Brian Gibbons: I have contacted NHS trusts in Wales and have been reassured by their responses. All trusts, as part of a sound management process, operate a vacancy review procedure. This is to ensure that, as posts become available, assessment of service requirements are undertaken in order to deliver effective efficient services which will not compromise patient care and are of the highest standard.

At the National Assembly Audit Committee on 4 May 2006, Ann Lloyd, Head of the Department for Health and Social Services, confirmed that she has asked Ian Stead, the acting NHS human resources director to work with NHS HR directors in Wales to ensure a thorough scrutiny of any plan that considers a reduction in staff.

I remain committed to ensuring that the NHS does not lose highly qualified staff.

David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on excess winter deaths in Wales clarifying the extent of the problem, underlying reasons, and comparisons with other countries? (WAQ46881)

Brian Gibbons: Excess winter deaths, i.e. deaths occurring in December to March minus the average of the deaths occurring in the preceding August to November and the following April to July, in Wales in 2004-05 (the latest year for which there are figures) have been provisionally estimated to be around 1,900. This represents 18.6 per cent more than non-winter deaths. Around 1,800 of these deaths occurred in people aged 65 and over. The comparable figure for England is around 29,700 excess winter deaths, 19.6 per cent higher than in the non-winter period.

Winter deaths in older people are mainly from heart attacks, strokes, bronchial and other respiratory conditions and often occur several days after exposure to the cold. Excess winter deaths are associated with cold weather though recent research is unclear as to the exact reason for this. A study of deaths in over 75s in Britain indicated previous experience of respiratory disease and being female as key factors.

A pan-European study of excess winter deaths over the period 1988 to 1997 showed that Portugal had the highest levels of excess winter deaths followed by Spain and Ireland. The lowest levels of excess winter deaths were in countries such as Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands. The same study showed that cross-country variations in mean winter environmental temperature, mean winter relative humidity, parity adjusted per capita national income, per capita health expenditure, rates of income poverty, inequality, deprivation, and fuel poverty, and several indicators of residential thermal standards were found to be significantly related to variations in relative excess winter mortality.

The countries in which excess winter death rates are higher tend to have housing stock that is less well insulated than in other countries. In Wales, and in the rest of the UK, it has been suggested that people take winter less seriously than in countries with more severe winters such as Germany, Finland or Austria.

The Welsh Assembly Government has a number of initiatives to address this problem. The home energy efficiency scheme makes grants available to households to make their house warmer and more energy efficient. HEES has received an additional £10 million from the Welsh Assembly Government in 2006-

08 with an emphasis on helping older people: those over 80 will be eligible to receive grants independently of benefits status. There are a number of other schemes in Wales aimed at helping older people to maintain warmer homes such as Warm Wales.

The annual 'Keep Well This Winter' campaign helps older people to keep warm by encouraging them to apply for HEES grants, respond to Warm Wales and other initiatives and to seek advice on making their homes warmer and more energy efficient.

David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on the older people and ageing research and development network and clarify whether its remit includes research into excess winter deaths in Wales? (WAQ46884)

Brian Gibbons: The older people and ageing research network is one of nine research networks that the Wales Office of Research and Development has recently commissioned as part of a new research and development infrastructure for Wales. The networks bring together academic and service professionals to address areas of importance in health and social care. They function as 'creative hubs' within the infrastructure, developing high quality research proposals for which they will seek external funding. They will, over time, increase both the quality and quantity of research taking place in Wales and contribute significantly to a growing evidence-base to inform policy making.

All networks were required by WORD to produce indicative research portfolios as part of their bid for network status. These set out the research areas that are likely to be the focus of the networks' initial endeavours. Reducing excess winter deaths is one of a number of such topics identified by the older people and ageing research network as a potential area of work. The older people and ageing research network is, however, in the very early stages of its development and, as yet, no funding has been secured to directly take forward research in this area. The priority research areas for the older people and ageing research network in its first year of operation include: falls, osteoporosis, stroke, frailty, medication, smart housing and intermediate care.

You may be interested to note that the older people and ageing research network is led by Professor Judith Phillips and Dr. Susan Lambert of University of Wales Swansea.

Jenny Randerson: Of the £15 million additional funding for dentistry in 2006-07, £12.4 million has been secured from savings elsewhere within the health and social services main expenditure budget: from which specific budget lines have these savings been drawn? (WAQ46893)

Brian Gibbons: The £12.4 million additional funding secured for dentistry in 2006-07 has been drawn against budget expenditure 0682: other central budgets, within the health and social services main

expenditure group.

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on the future of the post office in Llandyrnog? (WAQ46837)

The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (Edwina Hart): Post office matters are a non-devolved function. However, I refer you to the transcript of the short debate on the future of sub-post offices in Wales, held on 3 May 2006.

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to rural post office services in Wales? (WAQ46839)

Edwina Hart: Post office matters are a non-devolved function. However, I refer you to the answer I gave to Irene James's WAQ46844 and WAQ46845 on 12 May.

Irene James: What action is the Welsh Assembly Government taking support a local Post Office service? (WAQ46844)

Irene James: Will the Minister make a statement about the importance of maintaining local post office services? (WAQ46845)

Edwina Hart. Post office services are non-devolved matters. However, I refer you to the transcript of the Short Debate on the future of sub-post offices in Wales, held on 3 May 2006.

Brynle Williams: What provisions is the Minister making to increase the availability of affordable housing in Flintshire? (WAQ46867)

Edwina Hart: I have allocated £6.261 million of social housing grant to Flintshire County Council for the two years 2006 to 2008. This amount, when supplemented by private finance, will make nearly £9 million available for the provision of 150 units of new affordable housing for rent and assisted ownership during the period.

The authority has programmed £800,000 in the next two years specifically to fund the homebuy scheme in Flintshire.

Peter Black: What representatives has the Welsh Assembly Government made to the UK Government on how the Welsh Assembly Government can influence the future of post offices in Wales? (WAQ46874)

Edwina Hart: Post offices are non-devolved.

I have exchanged correspondence and held bilateral meetings with the relevant UK Government Ministers. This includes Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions, for Trade and Industry and for Wales. My officials also meet regularly with their Whitehall counterparts to discuss a range of issues, including the future of post office services in Wales.

Janet Ryder: Why have the original figures supplied by Cymorth to groups in receipt of Supporting People money been reduced down and reissued? (WAQ46918)

Edwina Hart: The funding made available to the Supporting People programme for 2006-07 has been increased, not decreased, as a result of the additional £5 million which I announced in February 2006: the allocation was increased from £124.1 million to £129.1 million.

Cymorth Cymru issued a briefing paper shortly after my announcement, which was sent to my officials for verification. There were several errors in the way figures had been rounded up or down, but regrettably these errors were not identified at the time.

Officials have issued an apology to the Supporting People information network and to Cymorth Cymru for this oversight.