

Written Questions answered between 26 April and 2 May 2002

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

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

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Questions to the First Minister

Contact between the Permanent Secretary and the Police

Ron Davies: On how many occasions has the First Minister discussed with the Permanent Secretary the contacts that the Permanent Secretary has had with the police? (WAQ17229)

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): The Permanent Secretary and I have discussed contacts with the police on a small number of occasions.

Progress Report on the Investigation into Michael German

Ron Davies: When did his administration receive the last progress report on the investigation into Mike German by South Wales Police? (WAQ17238)

The First Minister: 23 April.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Peter Black: Will the First Minister make a statement on his administration's priorities in discussions with UK Government Ministers on the forthcoming comprehensive spending review? (WAQ17285)

The First Minister: I have made it clear to the Secretary of State for Wales that our key priority for the current spending review is to ensure that we are able to continue to secure funding for European structural funds over and above the normal Barnett formula arrangements. We also expect to receive our proper consequential share of changes to comparable public expenditure in England, to enable the Welsh Assembly Government to address our strategic priorities.

Questions to the Minister for Economic Development

Prospects for Manufacturing Jobs

Alison Halford: Will the Minister make a statement about the long-term prospects for manufacturing jobs in Wales? (WAQ17139)

The Minister for Economic Development (Andrew Davies): Manufacturing is an important sector in Wales and the Assembly Government believes that it has a bright future provided firms innovate and move up the value chain. The Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Development Agency have a number of programs to encourage firms in this way, for example, the Accelerate Wales programme.

The Assembly Government is also supporting the Welsh centre of manufacturing excellence. The competition for this is shortly to be completed. The successful organisation or consortium will form part of an integrated support system to modernise manufacturing and increase the take-up of leading edge technology and techniques by small and medium-sized enterprises throughout Wales. In addition to this, 20 departments in higher education institutions across Wales were accredited with CETIC (centre of excellence in technology and industrial collaboration) status last year, and are now helping companies gain access to extensive expertise in a wide range of high-tech fields, to develop new and existing products.

The Welsh Development Agency also has a number of programmes in place to help manufacturing industry, such as Source Wales, which is regarded as one of the best services of its kind in the world.

With support from these initiatives, among others, I am confident the long-term prospects for manufacturing are good and that it will continue to play a vital role in the Welsh economy.

Gender Pay Gap in North-east Wales

Alison Halford: What action is the Minister taking to reduce the widening gender pay gap in north-east Wales? (WAQ17140)

Andrew Davies: The Welsh Assembly Government launched the equal pay campaign on 7 March 2002 at three separate venues: Cardiff bay, Llandudno and Swansea. A continuing 'Close the Pay Gap Campaign' is being rolled out in partnership with the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Wales Trades Union Congress over the next year.

The Assembly Government is also funding Chwarae Teg, to support its role in promoting women's participation in the labour market in Wales. Chwarae Teg, which has an office in north-east Wales, was funded in 2001-02 for a project to undertake some in-depth research on the position of women in the Welsh economy.

The Assembly itself also implemented the equal pay strategies within its last pay agreement, to ensure that women who choose to have a family are not financially penalised for taking time off work to raise that family.

Commercially Confidential Information

Alison Halford: How many documents/pieces of information has the Economic Development Department determined are 'commercially confidential' since January 2000? (WAQ17141)

Andrew Davies: The information would be available only at a disproportionate cost. For instance on regional selective assistance, SMART, SPUR and regional innovation grant schemes since January 2000, the Economic Development Department has issued 774 offer letters regarded as commercially confidential. Depending on its complexity, each case might be supported by over 30 similarly confidential documents on file. An accurate assessment of the volume of commercially confidential material could only be determined by reviewing each of these and other files.

Disposal of Fridges

Alison Halford: What action has the Minister taken to enable Welsh businesses to both cope and seize the opportunities that are arising out of new regulations that prevent the disposal of fridges without steps being taken to prevent the escape of chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons from fridge insulation foam during disposal? (WAQ17143)

Andrew Davies: The Welsh Assembly Government has provided regional selective assistance to a company that is constructing a facility with CFC recovery equipment. Also, the Assembly's recent amendment to the waste management licensing regulations will provide further opportunities for companies in Wales to offer services for the recovery of refrigeration equipment using mobile plant.

In addition, the WDA's environmental team, WalesTrade International, and the environmental goods and services programme, jointly funded by the WDA and Pathway to Prosperity, have been working with Welsh companies to seize opportunities arising from environmental legislation, including that related to the disposal of refrigeration equipment.

Economic Investment Opportunities

William Graham: What discussions has the Minister held with representatives of the business community of south-east Wales to co-ordinate the economic investment opportunities that will arise from area being associated with the 2010 Ryder Cup? (WAQ17220)

Andrew Davies: Assembly Government officials, along with the Welsh Development Agency, the Wales Tourist Board, the Sports Council for Wales and Newport County Borough Council, are currently considering arrangements to co-ordinate a range of activities related to the Ryder Cup 2010. More specifically, the WDA has the role of maximising the economic opportunities that are available and it is already developing a marketing strategy.

The WTB also has an important role. As part of the 'bid', WTB has already secured the involvement of a significant number of accommodation providers in Wales, including many in the south-east Wales area. The WTB is also in discussion with tourism operators throughout Wales, again including many in south-east Wales, about developing tourism products and facilities. A golf tourism strategy, which is due to be finalised next month, will further focus activities and highlight development opportunities.

Community Investment Authority

Peter Black: Will the Minister provide an update on the partnership Government's pledge for a community investment authority? (WAQ17221)

Andrew Davies: The community investment tax credit is being cleared by the Treasury through the state aids procedure and we are awaiting final details. We are in close touch with the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry on the matter, with a view to maximising the advantages for Wales when the full details of the scheme are settled.

Impact of the M4 Motorway on Economic Development

William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the impact of the M4 motorway on the economic development of Wales? (WAQ17222)

Andrew Davies: The economic impact of the M4 has two main elements:

- on the costs of transport, for example through shorter journey times;
- a wider economic impact on existing and potential new businesses.

Shorter journey times clearly create overall economic benefits, though it is possible individual businesses and specific locations may be disadvantaged by the increased competition which reduced travel costs make possible. The overall effects can be quantified by standard transport models.

Whether there are wider additional economic effects of transport improvements either generally or locally is more contentious. The Standing Advisory Committee for Trunk Road Assessment's report 'Transport and the Economy' (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999) concluded:

'Empirical evidence of the scale and significance of such effects is... weak and disputed... generalisations about the effects of transport on the economy are subject to strong dependence on specific local circumstances.'

While the SCATRA report notes that some areas may gain and some may lose from any additional effects and that it is difficult to predict the geographical distribution of winners and losers, there is little doubt that the existing M4 has brought overall advantages to south Wales.

Unemployment Rates in the Brecon Planning Area

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on the growing unemployment rates in the Brecon planning area? (WAQ17223)

Andrew Davies: The latest Office for National Statistics unemployment figures for March 2002 show that the unemployment rate, on the claimant count measure, in the Brecon travel to work area, remained

unchanged from a year earlier. Two hundred and sixty-eight people are currently classed as unemployed; this corresponds to an unemployment rate of 2.1 per cent, 1.8 percentage points below the all-Wales rate.

Employment Prospects at the British Royal Mint at Llantrisant

Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement about employment prospects at the Royal Mint at Llantrisant? (WAQ17224)

Andrew Davies: The Royal Mint is examining working practices, jobs and other business costs with a view to maintaining its capability for producing quality products in an increasingly competitive world market.

The workforce was informed of the restructuring exercise on 28 March and a formal consultation period is presently underway. I understand that some 200 jobs are at risk, out of a total workforce of 1,000, and that the mint will try to implement the job losses on a voluntary basis.

The Assembly Government and its Team Wales partners stand ready to offer appropriate assistance to those affected.

Cardiff International Airport

David Davies: How many passengers have passed through Cardiff airport each year since 1999? (WAQ17443)

Andrew Davies: According to figures provided by the Civil Aviation Authority, the number of passengers using Cardiff international airport are as shown in the table below:

Year	Number of passengers using Cardiff International Airport (a)
1999	1,325,000
2000	1,518,000
2001	1,544,000
2002	No data yet available for this year

(a) Rounded to the nearest thousand. Figures include scheduled and charter passengers joining or leaving an aircraft at the airport, or arriving and departing at the airport on the same aircraft. Excludes air taxis.

Swansea Airport

David Davies: How many passengers have passed through Swansea airport each year since 1999? (WAQ17444)

Andrew Davies: No scheduled or chartered services operated from Swansea airport prior to 16 October 2001.

According to figures provided directly by the airport, the number of passengers booked on flights from Swansea airport for the period 16 October 2001 to 31 December 2002 is 4,659 (at 31 March 2002). No more detail is currently available.

Economic Development Budget

Alun Cairns: Will the Minister please identify the specific duties that fall under the budget expenditure line 'euro facilitators' in the Economic Development budget? (WAQ17466)

Andrew Davies: The euro facilitators budget provides funding to increase the capacity of the voluntary and private sectors to access and make best use of European structural fund programmes.

It is typically used to support facilitator posts on a matched funding basis. These facilitators assist organisations by raising awareness of the programmes and the funding opportunities available, providing advice and guidance on accessing funding, and providing a link with local and regional partnerships.

The euro facilitators budget also provides funding to support the activities of the Wales Social Partners Unit Ltd. In addition to providing social partners with additional capacity to engage effectively with the Assembly, the unit provides support for social partner representatives on euro programme monitoring committees and partnerships.

Questions to the Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language

Arts Council of Wales Redundancy Payments

Owen John Thomas: With reference to the reply to WAQ17044, will the Minister indicate how many staff at the Arts Council of Wales received redundancy payments, and what was the largest amount paid to a single individual? (WAQ17281)

The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language (Jenny Randerson): Further to my answer to WAQ17044, nine Arts Council staff have received redundancy payments, the largest of which was £30,000.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Youth Issues

Alison Halford: What is the Minister doing to deal with youth issues such as those faced by thousands of Welsh young people when they leave home and begin to live independently of their families? (WAQ17132)

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): The issues facing young people when they leave home and begin to live independently are many, varied and complex. Some of these issues, such as finding somewhere to live, keeping in good health, and feeling safe in their new communities, are the direct responsibility of Cabinet colleagues. Others, such as adequate and appropriate welfare benefits, come under Whitehall Government departments. More often than not, these issues impact upon each other and require genuine and innovative cross-cutting approaches. The important thing is that we ensure that we give all young people in Wales the very best opportunities to make the most of their lives.

On my part, a real example of our determination to see effective cross-cutting in action is ‘Extending Entitlement’, which, for the first time, will bring together key planners and deliverers, in each local authority area, to ensure a coherent, rounded and *universal* approach to services to young people in Wales.

‘Extending Entitlement’ recognises that good, reliable information is vital. This is why we are actively supporting the development of Canllaw Online, which offers literally thousands of items of essential information that empower young people to make the best life choices.

Copies of ‘Extending Entitlement’ and Canllaw Online’s information pack are available from the Members’ Library.

Commercially Confidential Information

Alison Halford: How many departmental documents have been classed as ‘commercially confidential’ since the Minister became Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning? (WAQ17212)

Jane Davidson: The number of documents classified as commercially confidential within my department is not collected centrally and could be determined only at disproportionate cost. Any documents so classified, and I suspect that there would be relatively few, would be in relation to specific contracts, for example, tendering documents.

Practical Lessons in Schools

Ann Jones: What guidelines exist on class sizes for practical lessons in schools? (WAQ17279)

Ann Jones: How many (a) deaths and (b) serious accidents have occurred in practical lessons in schools in each of the last 10 years and will the Minister make a statement? (WAQ17280)

Jane Davidson: I am not aware of any guidelines on class sizes for practical lessons in schools. Health and safety in schools is the responsibility of the local education authority, governing bodies and school staff. Guidance is provided to schools by the Health and Safety Executive on health and safety legislation that may apply to them and on managing health and safety. Information on accidents and deaths in schools in Wales is not collected by the Assembly Government but schools have a duty to report accidents and fatalities to the Health and Safety Executive. I have asked it for a report and will forward this when it is available.

The ‘Reading, Writing, Arithmetic’ Campaign

David Davies: What is the Minister doing to monitor the results of the ‘reading, writing, arithmetic’ campaign? (WAQ17449)

Jane Davidson: The impact of each of the three strands of the promotion campaign is being evaluated formally by Market Research Wales; results are expected in June of this year.

Provision of Education for Children Excluded from Schools

Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of education for children who are temporarily hospitalised or excluded from school on grounds of health and safety? (WAQ17452)

Jane Davidson: Local education authorities have a duty to make arrangements for any child of compulsory school age who cannot receive suitable education for any period, due to illness, exclusion from school or otherwise. In these circumstances the LEA is responsible for providing education at school, or elsewhere, and should discuss these arrangements with the parent. LEAs must also decide how they will provide suitable education in accordance with the LEA’s policies (for example, as set out in their behaviour support plans), having regard to any guidance issued by the Assembly, and with the efficient use of the LEA’s resources.

The relevant Assembly guidance on these matters can be found in Welsh Office Circular 57/94 on ‘The Education of Sick Children’ and in National Assembly Circular 3/99, ‘Pupil Support and Social Inclusion’. Circular 57/94, which is due to be revised by this autumn, recommends that LEAs have a written policy in place on the education of sick children and suggests that LEAs ought to make provision for children who are likely to be out of school for over four weeks. Circular 3/99 also points to LEAs’ ability to arrange part-time attendance at school as part of a package of measures to provide suitable education.

Questions to the Minister for Environment

Free Bus Passes

David Davies: What percentage of eligible pensioners in Wales has taken up their right to a free bus pass? (WAQ17253)

The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex): The new scheme is proving immensely popular, not only among pensioners and disabled people, but everyone who supports our objective of promoting accessibility and more affordable public transport. It is too early to provide an accurate figure of the percentage of eligible pensioners in Wales who have taken up their right to a free bus pass. Early indications are that of the 600,000 people who could potentially benefit under the new scheme, over half that number have already taken up their right to a free bus pass. Recent feedback from local authorities is that this number is steadily growing.

The Welsh Assembly Government is funding a study under the auspices of local authorities and operators to determine the usage and impact of the scheme in 2002-03.

Expected Take up of Free Bus Travel

David Davies: How many pensioners are expected to take up the option of free bus travel over the next three years? (WAQ17300)

Sue Essex: This scheme could benefit as many as 600,000 pensioners and people with disabilities in Wales. This figure will increase by a further 75,000 when entitlement is extended to men between 60 and pensionable age, with effect from 2003.

Potentially, 600,000 people could currently benefit from the new scheme and over half that number have already taken up their right to a free bus pass. We cannot say how many exactly will take up the option over the next three years.

Access Road to the Deganwy Dock Development

Peter Rogers: Will the Minister please make a statement on representations she has received concerning the access road to the Deganwy Dock development? (WAQ17428)

Sue Essex: The Assembly has received a small number of letters about the proposal, principally from a local pressure group, but also from other interested parties and local residents. We have also received a copy of a petition, objecting to the proposal, containing about a thousand signatures. Among the representations received are requests to have the planning application called in, and these are under consideration.

Cost of the Widening Project on the M4

Jonathan Morgan: What is the estimated cost of the planned M4 widening project between Coryton and Castleton? (WAQ17430)

Sue Essex: The widening is expected to cost in the region of £44 million, but actual costs will depend on design details and the outcome of statutory procedures.

Land Space Available for the Widening Project on the M4

Jonathan Morgan: What is the total amount of land space that will be required to facilitate the widening of the M4 between Coryton and Castleton? (WAQ17431)

Sue Essex: The total amount of land required will be determined by the next stage of scheme design and statutory procedures, but will be kept to the minimum required for the construction of the scheme.

Questions to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

Corporate Social Responsibility

Alison Halford: What is the Minister doing to encourage community responsibility of companies in Wales? (WAQ17205)

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): Many aspects of corporate social responsibility cover non-devolved matters, such as reporting to Companies House and ethical trading. However, there is also scope for the Assembly Government to encourage corporate social responsibility in a number of ways in making progress with its policies. Specific areas on which the Assembly Government's policies have impacted to encourage corporate social responsibility have been in generating the community loans fund between Finance Wales and HSBC, the WDA's sponsorship of Menter a Busnes awards for companies using and promoting the Welsh language, and the voluntary code of practice for suppliers.

Administration of Village Halls

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: If a village hall is run by a community council, should the councillors declare an interest when discussing matters relating to the village hall, and, if so, will the Minister provide guidance on how such councillors can effectively administer a village hall? (WAQ17240)

Edwina Hart: I cannot give an opinion on a question of law. The community council should seek its own legal advice or ask the monitoring officer of its principal authority for advice. Guidance on the new code of conduct and the ethical framework will be issued for consultation at the end of May.

Cost of Taxi Fares

Jonathan Morgan: What were the costs of taxi fares for civil servants and officials travelling between Cathays park and Cardiff bay during the 1999 to 2002 period? (WAQ17241)

Edwina Hart: The National Assembly for Wales is not able to provide a breakdown of the cost of taxi fares for journeys between Cathays park and Cardiff bay, as this information is not held centrally.

Barnett Consequential Increase for the NHS in Wales

Ron Davies: Pursuant to her answer to WAQ15795, what percentage of the figure of £68.8 million represents the relevant additional resources provided via the Barnett consequential increase during the same period? (WAQ17250)

Edwina Hart: The additional resources of £68.8 million made available to the NHS in Wales outside of the usual Barnett arrangements, represents the equivalent of about 2 per cent of the current health budget, excluding social services.

Number of Civil Servants Employed at the National Assembly for Wales

Nick Bourne: How many civil servants are currently employed in the National Assembly, broken down into each ministerial department, and how does this compare with the number employed when the Assembly was set up? (WAQ17291)

Edwina Hart: Issues relating to staff employed by the National Assembly are a matter for the Permanent Secretary. The Welsh Assembly Government does not have a departmental structure. The number of permanent full-time equivalent civil servants employed by the National Assembly by Group at 1 July 1999 and 1 April 2002 is as follows:

Group	1 July 1999	1 April 2002
Presiding Office	92	204
Wales European Funding Office	-	89
Economic Development Department	198	328
Agriculture (and Rural Affairs)	487	645
Transport, Planning and Environment	232	266
Office of the Counsel General	40	55
Cabinet Secretariat	56	120
Personnel Management and Business Services	274	329
Finance Group	170	125
Research and Development Group	-	94
NHS Directorate	186	219
Chief Nursing Officer	9	11
Chief Medical Officer	90	109
Social Policy	-	251
Local Government, Housing and Culture	154	135
Social Services Inspectorate Wales	21	28
Community Regeneration and Social Inclusion	-	26
Training and Education	145	170
Estates Division	5	6
CADW	173	196

It must be noted that since the establishment of the National Assembly 434 permanent staff have transferred in from the following organisations and these are included in the above figures:

Dec 1999	Teacher Training Agency	6
April 2000	Welsh European Programme Executive	44
April 2000	Wales Office Research and Development	8
April 2001	Farming and Rural Conservation Agency	103
June 2001	Welsh Drug and Alcohol Unit	7
July 2001	Clinical and Effectiveness Support Unit	6
April 2002	Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales	254
TOTAL		434

Barnett Formula Consequentials

Janet Ryder: Further to your written statement on the budget on 18 April, could you make a statement explaining as a result of which successful bid by UK Government departments has the Assembly received a Barnett formula consequential of £6.858 million in 2002-03? (WAQ17426)

Edwina Hart: As I explained in my written statement, the consequential of £6.858 million is derived from successful bids by a number of UK Government departments in the current capital modernisation fund round. I will write to explain how the capital modernisation fund operates and place a copy of my letter in the Members' Library.

Barnett Formula Consequentials

Janet Ryder: Further to your written statement on the budget on 18 April, could you make a statement explaining as a result of which successful bid by UK Government departments has the Assembly received Barnett formula consequential adjustments of £2.564 million in 2002-03 and £1.923 million in 2003-04? (WAQ17427)

Edwina Hart: These Barnett formula consequentials adjustments are derived from successful bids by UK Government departments in a recent invest to save budget round that result in increases of £1.680 million in 2002-03 and £1.039 million in 2003-04. I will write to explain how the invest to save budget scheme operates and place a copy of the letter in the Members' Library. In addition, a further £0.884 million in each year is a consequential arising from increased Department for Education and Skills funding for Learning and Skills Council support for small organisations to achieve the Investors in People standard. As I explained in my statement, for the time being these resources are allocated to the Assembly's reserve.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Transport Assistance for Cancer Patients in North Wales

Alison Halford: What will the Minister be doing to ensure that north Wales cancer patients have the same transport assistance to that currently enjoyed by south Wales people via the successor body to the Cancer Care Society, which recently received £40,000 from the Welsh Assembly Government? (WAQ17133)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): I was pleased to be able to provide a one-off payment of £20,000 each to the new organisations which were set up in Mountain Ash and Merthyr Tydfil to take over the transport services and drop-in centres threatened by the pull-out by the Cancer Care Society. These sums helped the new organisations, which bring together local people, voluntary organisations and the statutory services, to bridge a short-term funding gap. I released the funding against receipt of robust recovery plans which showed a reasonable chance of a long-term future for the new organisations, including secure, stable core-funding arrangements.

I shall judge any future similar situation on its merits, wherever it occurs in Wales, and subject, of course, to funds being available at the time

Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection

David Melding: In light of the extra resources committed to NHS Wales, will the Minister make a statement on how she intends to strengthen the system of inspection and audit to improve NHS accountability to patients and the public? (WAQ17225)

David Melding: Does the Minister intend to establish an independent Wales-only commission for healthcare audit and inspection? (WAQ17226)

David Melding: Will the new commission for healthcare audit and inspection cover NHS Wales? (WAQ17227)

Jane Hutt: On 18 April 2002, the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Milburn MP, published 'Delivering the NHS Plan', which addresses the next steps in investment and reform of the NHS in England. In the report, he announced his intention to create a new commission for healthcare audit and inspection for England.

The Welsh Assembly Government is considering whether a similar arrangement should be established here in Wales and, if so, whether and how Wales should link to the proposed new commission.

Audit of NHS Funds

David Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on whether independent auditors will be appointed to oversee the allocation of funds to the NHS in Wales? (WAQ17236)

Jane Hutt: On 18 April 2002, the Secretary of State for Health, the Right Honourable Alan Milburn MP, published 'Delivering the NHS Plan' which addresses the next steps in investment and reform of the NHS in England. In the report, he announced his intention to create a new commission for healthcare audit and inspection for England.

The Welsh Assembly Government is considering whether a similar arrangement should be established here in Wales and, if so, whether and how Wales should link to the proposed new commission.

Number of Under-16 Teenage Conceptions

Owen John Thomas: What is the rate and number of under-16 teenage conceptions for the years 1998, 1999 and 2000 in Wales? (WAQ17239)

Jane Hutt:

Conceptions to females under the age of 16 (a)

Year	Number	Rate (b)
1998	597	10.7
1999	537	9.5
2000	494	8.5

(a) Conceptions which resulted in either a live or still birth or termination by legal abortion.

(b) Rate per 1,000 females aged 13 to 15.

Investigation into Care Homes for the Elderly in South Wales

Jonathan Morgan: How will the events at the Hazelcroft care home in Cardiff feature in the Minister's investigation into care homes for the elderly in south Wales? (WAQ17242)

Jane Hutt: The scope of the examination by the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales includes the safeguarding and the meeting of the care needs of vulnerable adults in homes contracted by Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan to Hafod Housing Association. The arrangements for Hazelcroft will be included in this examination.

Investigation into Care Homes for the Elderly in South Wales (Plenary Debate)

Jonathan Morgan: Will the report resulting from the Minister's investigation into care homes for the elderly in south Wales be debated in Plenary? (WAQ17243)

Jane Hutt: I have already undertaken to report the findings to the Health and Social Services Committee and will review the need for a Plenary debate in the light of its views.

Investigation into Care Homes for the Elderly in South Wales (Police Involvement)

Jonathan Morgan: Will the police be involved during the Minister's investigation of care homes for the elderly in south Wales? (WAQ17244)

Jane Hutt: It is a matter for the police to determine what investigations they undertake. If those undertaking the examination become aware of any issues that appear to require investigation by the police, they will pass these on to the police.

Investigation into Care Homes for the Elderly in South Wales (Interviews with Former Residents)

Jonathan Morgan: Will former residents of Hazelcroft care home be interviewed as part of the Minister's investigation into care homes for the elderly in south Wales? (WAQ17245)

Jane Hutt: The examination team will be making itself available to any former residents who wish to be interviewed.

Investigation into Care Homes for the Elderly in South Wales (Interviews with Staff)

Jonathan Morgan: Will the Minister confirm whether staff who worked at the Hazelcroft care home in Cardiff will be interviewed during the investigation into care homes for the elderly in south Wales? (WAQ17246)

Jane Hutt: The examination team will be making itself available to any staff who wish to be interviewed and fall within the scope of the examination.

NHS Funding

Ron Davies: Is it the Minister's policy to continue to fund the NHS in such a way as to maintain the current differential level of spending in Wales compared to that of England? (WAQ17251)

Jane Hutt: The Welsh Assembly Government will set out its priorities for the health agenda in Wales and the provision of resources will be addressed as part of the annual budget planning process in the usual way.

Electronic Prescribing

Kirsty Williams: What progress has been made towards electronic prescribing in Wales? (WAQ17252)

Jane Hutt: 'Electronic prescribing' is a high-level term used to describe all stages in the prescribing, dispensing, pricing, payment and record keeping processes. This is a complex area, involving the development of systems and infrastructure with many possible solutions of varying benefit and risk, many of which are difficult to quantify.

For this reason, I have commissioned a scoping study to evaluate the options for 'electronic prescribing' across primary and secondary care, in order to produce a recommendation for the best way forward for the NHS in Wales.

The contract for the scoping study has been awarded to the Indigo Consulting Group under the usual tendering process. A project board, consisting of Assembly Officials, community and hospital pharmacists and a general practitioner, has been established to oversee the scoping study and take its recommendations forward. The process of gathering information for the study, which includes conducting interviews with key NHS and information technology personnel in Wales, has begun. The study report is expected this autumn.

National Standards and Guidance on the Care of Stroke Patients

Kirsty Williams: Does the Minister intend to introduce national standards and guidance on the care of stroke patients? (WAQ17254)

Jane Hutt: The Department of Health published a national service framework for older people in March 2001. This covers a wide range of issues and sets out standards for each. Standard five is concerned with the care of stroke patients. We are currently considering with the NHS and partner agencies how best to take forward the national service framework in Wales. Consultation is due to end in July.

If there is general acceptance that the stroke standard should and could apply in Wales, we shall publish it in the form of guidance to the service.

Improving Outcomes for Stroke Patients

Kirsty Williams: What steps will the Minister take to improve outcomes for stroke patients? (WAQ17255)

Jane Hutt: We are currently considering how to take the national service framework for older people forward in Wales. Stroke is covered by one of the proposed standards which are now out for consultation. If there is general acceptance of the standards, we propose to publish them in the form of guidance.

Money is being provided by the new opportunities fund to reduce the burden of coronary heart disease, stroke and cancer. The proposed direction for stroke funding is to channel it towards a rehabilitation and support service. The new opportunities fund has been in touch with the National Stroke Association to discuss this.

Unfilled Vacancies for Nurses

David Davies: How many vacancies for nurses remain unfilled across Wales? (WAQ17459)

Jane Hutt: In March 2001 there were 18,136 full-time equivalent qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors employed in the NHS in Wales. There were 739 vacancies of three months or more duration, representing a vacancy rate of 3.9 per cent. The figures showing the position at September 2001 are not yet available.

Community Hospitals in Wales

Peter Law: What action is the Minister taking to develop community hospitals in Wales? (WAQ17462)

Jane Hutt: Policy on the role and future of community hospitals was issued in 1996 in the report 'Community Hospitals in Wales: the Future'. The report provided purchasers and providers with advice regarding the potential of community hospitals.

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

'Access and Excellence: Acute Health Services in Wales' describes the possible role of smaller hospitals in providing community-based services both in support of or directly from primary care teams.

Local health groups, NHS trusts and other key stakeholders are responsible for considering and agreeing the role of their community hospitals as part of delivering the wider health agenda.

Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs and Assembly Business

Safety Standards for Imported Beef

Alison Halford: What steps are being taken to ensure all imported beef used in Wales meets the highest safety standards? (WAQ17209) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Health and Social Services*

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): Responsibility for the safety of food lies with the Minister of Health and Social Services, advised by the Food Standards Agency. All meat imports must be produced in accordance with European Union rules on hygiene and BSE. It is the responsibility of the relevant national authorities to ensure compliance with EU rules, but standards are checked by EU inspectors. Imports from non-EU countries must enter through designated border inspection posts. All consignments have a documentary and identity check, and around 20 per cent are subject to a random physical check. Meat from other EU states is not subject to border inspection because it is in 'free circulation' under EU single market rules. However, all imports of carcass beef from other EU countries are subject to inspection by the Meat Hygiene Service at point of destination: it is through these checks that breaches in EU controls on specified risk material have been detected. Such breaches are taken up vigorously with the authorities of the country concerned.

Shortages of Strychnine

Peter Rogers: Will the Minister make a statement on strychnine shortages preventing mole control in Wales? (WAQ17424)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Assembly Business (Carwyn Jones): I am aware that there is currently a shortage of strychnine for mole control in the UK but have been advised that it is likely to be remedied in the very near future. There are also other methods of mole control, such as trapping and gassing using fumigant aluminium phosphide.

Misappropriation of Subsidies

Ieuan Wyn Jones: Further to your answer on 24 March 2002 to WAQ17101, has the system of internal control identified any examples of fraud or misappropriation of subsidies and, if so, could you provide the details, including the amounts involved? (WAQ17425)

Carwyn Jones: The Agriculture Department has robust systems of control. European common agricultural policy subsidies are controlled by the integrated administration and control system, which was introduced by European legislation in 1993. Each year, 10 per cent of subsidy applications are physically inspected.

Over the last year one case has been sent for investigation for possible fraud (one other is under consideration). These cases are confidential and I cannot therefore release any further details.

Cost of Answering a Written Assembly Question

Janice Gregory: How much is the average cost of providing an answer to a written Assembly question? (WAQ17463) [R]

Carwyn Jones: The average cost of providing an answer to a written Assembly question is £125. This figure derives from a calculation, up-rated for inflation, provided on 15 December 1999, by the Minister for Finance following a question in Plenary (23 September, 1999) by John Griffiths, AM. A copy of the Minister for Finance's response was placed in the Library.

Cases of Foot and Mouth Disease in Wild Mammals

Ron Davies: Pursuant to the Minister's answer to WAQ17045, how many cases of foot and mouth disease were a) suspected and b) confirmed in wild mammals in Wales during each of the last two outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, and which animal species were involved? (WAQ17465)

Carwyn Jones: There is no evidence to suggest that wild animals became infected or diseased by foot and mouth disease in either the 2001 or 1967-68 outbreaks that affected Wales. Testing of wild animals was carried out during the recent outbreak with negative results and such animals were not suspected of playing a role in disease spread. Tests carried out on deer in the 1970s suggested that wild deer could potentially contract infection but were considered not to represent a long-term risk.