

Written Questions answered between 14 and 21 August 2003

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

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

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Questions to the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport

Sport for Blind and Disabled People

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on plans to promote sport for blind people in Wales? (WAQ27703)

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on plans to promote sport for disabled people in Wales? (WAQ27704)

The Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport (Alun Pugh): On 28 July, I launched my sports and active recreation strategy, 'Climbing Higher'. The document has disability issues as its central theme. The consultation exercise currently underway will inform future policy to promote sport and active recreation both for blind people specifically and disabled people more generally.

The Welsh Assembly Government supports sport for disabled people through the Sports Council for Wales, which continues to work closely with the Federation of Sports Associations for the Disabled (Wales).

Access for Canoeists on Rivers

Laura Anne Jones: What discussions has the Minister had regarding access agreements for canoeists on rivers in Wales? (WAQ27780) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside.*

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister explain why the Welsh Assembly Government has refused to hold an inquiry into opening up access for canoeists on rivers in Wales? (WAQ27783) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside.*

The Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Carwyn Jones): The Assembly Government is keeping itself apprised of the outcome of demonstration projects being piloted in England, to develop best practice for access agreements for canoeists on key stretches of water. This follows research commissioned by central Government into the opportunities and demand for water-based sport and recreation.

Following a study carried out last year by the Wales Tourist Board, to evaluate activity holidays and their contribution to Welsh tourism, the board has developed a water sports strategy, which was published in August and contains an action plan for the development and marketing of water sports to visitors.

In light of these various ongoing initiatives, there are no current plans to hold an inquiry.

River Dee Tours

Laura Anne Jones: What discussions has the Minister had regarding the cancellation of the Dee tours? (WAQ27782) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside.*

Carwyn Jones: As access to the stretch of water concerned on the river Dee is a private right, the Welsh Canoeing Association must seek the permissions of relevant landowners and/or fishery owners for its annual Dee tours. Following the breakdown of negotiations between the WCA and the relevant owners, I am advised that the Environment Agency is seeking to broker discussions between the parties, with a view to forming a sub-group to agree a way forward.

Questions to the Minister for Economic Development and Transport

Sony Technology Centre Business Event (WDA Funding)

Alun Cairns: Further to WAQ27391, will the Minister make a statement on how much funding the WDA has given to support and sponsor the business event, not including the buffet breakfast, organised by Sony, the Chamber of Commerce, Bridgend County Borough Council, ELWa and WalesTrade International at Sony Technology Centre, Pencoed, due to take place on 24 September 2003? (WAQ27670)

The Minister for Economic Development and Transport (Andrew Davies): The agency's contribution towards the entire event is estimated to be £7,000.

The Wales Tourist Board (Trade Members)

Lisa Francis: Can the Minister give accounts of how many trade members the Wales Tourist Board has at the current time and what that is compared with last year? (WAQ27689)

Andrew Davies: The Wales Tourist Board is not a membership organisation and, as such, has no members per se. However, it has developed a number of quality assurance schemes, which businesses can join voluntarily. The table below shows numbers of participants in August 2003, compared with those in August 2002.

Scheme	August 2003	August 2002
Self-catering accommodation	3,532	3,158
Serviced accommodation	2,084	1,955
Other types of accommodation	133	113
British graded holiday parks scheme	319	328
Visitor attraction quality assurance service	47	62
Accreditation scheme for activity providers	56	79
Total	6,171	5,695

The Destination Management System

Lisa Francis: Can the Minister confirm whether the Wales Tourist Board has private plans or intentions to scrap the destination management system? (WAQ27690)

Andrew Davies: The Wales Tourist Board has no plans to scrap its destination management system, which is known as VisitWales.

The performance of VisitWales was discussed at length at the Economic Development and Transport Committee on 17 July and, at that meeting, the WTB acknowledged that aspects of VisitWales needed to be improved. It has commissioned a review to examine in detail all aspects of the operation of VisitWales. While this is likely to bring forward alterations to the detail of the system's operation, any changes will be an evolution and development of the current system.

The A495 at Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd

Brynle Williams: Further to WAQ27554, would the Minister outline the expected date/time frame when the current investigations will be completed and traffic-calming measures implemented on the A495 at Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd? (WAQ27691)

Andrew Davies: Further consultation with North Wales Police is ongoing. This is with a view to implement the scheme within the current financial year, subject to the satisfactory conclusion of the traffic regulation order procedure required for the speed limit.

The Economic Development and Transport Committee

Elin Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the timing of the announcement to abolish the Welsh European Funding Office and administer European funds from within the Assembly, when the decision was taken, and will he explain why he did not inform the Assembly's Economic Development and Transport Committee of the decision at its meeting on 17 July 2003? (WAQ27702)

Andrew Davies: The Welsh European Funding Office has not been abolished and has always been part of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Private and Public-sector Jobs in South Wales East

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on the number of jobs that have been created in the public sector over the past 12 months in South Wales East? (WAQ27705)

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on the number of jobs that have been created in the private sector over the past 12 months in South Wales East? (WAQ27706)

Andrew Davies: The available information is given in the table. There was an increase of 14,000 (or 5.5 per cent) in total employment in South Wales East in the year to May 2003 over the same period in the previous year. This compares with an increase of 4.0 per cent in Wales as a whole over the same period.

This information is based on the Labour Force Survey, which does not support the more detailed analysis needed to split the employment change into public and private sectors at this level of geography. For Wales as a whole, the public sector accounted for about 40 per cent of the increase in LFS employment over the same period. (It should be noted that the LFS figures are based on self-description by survey respondents, and tend to overestimate the size of the public sector.)

Total employment in South Wales East¹

	Thousands
June 2001 to May 2002	256
June 2002 to May 2003	270
Change	14
Percentage change	5.5 per cent

Source: Labour Force Survey

¹ Exact figures for South Wales East are not available. These figures are based on the following unitary authorities: Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Newport.

Traffic Congestion in South Wales East

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on plans to reduce traffic congestion in South Wales East? (WAQ27710)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly Government's strategy places an emphasis on improvements to all forms of public transport to provide an attractive alternative to the car. We are currently making grants available to enhance both rail and bus services throughout Wales.

Preparation for widening the M4 between Castleton (junction 29) and Coryton (junction 32) is underway, and construction is programmed to start between April 2005 and March 2008.

The M4 relief road between Magor (junction 23) and Castleton is currently on hold because, before making a decision, we need to consider all factors, which include the economic, environmental and social effects. In the meantime, the Assembly Government is considering a number of initiatives to help the flow of traffic on the M4. A making better use study is taking forward this work, looking at various options. The study is due for completion later this year.

AWCO Ltd Pulling Out of Wales

Alun Cairns: Did the Assembly Government receive any advance warning that AWCO Ltd (formerly Aluminium Wire and Conductors plc) was planning to pull out of Wales? (WAQ27735)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly Government had no advance warning that AWCO Ltd was going into administration.

Merlyn Contract Packers Ltd

Alun Cairns: What grant aid, if any, was given to Merlyn Contract Packers Ltd to relocate to the AWCO Ltd site at Fabian Way, Swansea? (WAQ27736)

Andrew Davies: An application for regional selective assistance was made but no grant was paid.

4 the Environment Ltd

Alun Cairns: What grant aid, if any, was given to 4 the Environment Ltd to relocate to the AWCO Ltd site at Fabian Way, Swansea? (WAQ27737)

Andrew Davies: A regional selective assistance grant was offered but no payments were made.

AWCO Ltd's Relocation to Baglan Bay

Alun Cairns: What reason was given for AWCO Ltd's (formerly Aluminium Wire and Conductors plc) relocation to Baglan bay? (WAQ27738)

Andrew Davies: The company indicated that this was for commercial reasons, particularly in terms of a smaller, cheaper and more manageable site.

AWCO Ltd's Relocation to Baglan Bay

Alun Cairns: What grant aid, if any, was given to AWCO Ltd (formerly Aluminium Wire and Conductors plc) to relocate to Baglan bay? (WAQ27739)

Andrew Davies: In November 2001, AWCO Ltd was paid an instalment of a total regional selective assistance offer of £200,000. This followed investment by the company of £465,000 and the safeguarding of 52 jobs. Following the issue of an administration order in May 2002, AWCO Ltd's business and assets were sold to Berbon Ltd. I understand that the wire-drawing facility and jobs continued after May 2002.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Trainees that Drop Out of ELWa-funded Schemes

Alun Cairns: How does the Minister monitor the number of trainees that drop out of ELWa-funded schemes? (WAQ27591)

Substantive answer following holding reply issued on 31 July 2003.

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): The Assembly Government requires the National Council—ELWa to monitor and evaluate all of its programmes. Figures provided by the national council suggest that, in 2001-02, around 75 per cent of further education students completed their studies while, in work-based learning, just over 65 per cent achieved a positive outcome in 2002-03. The proportion of trainees currently completing modern apprenticeship and foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks is around 39 per cent. This figure reflects a 9 percentage point increase over 2001-02 and represents significant progress towards the national council's target of 45 per cent.

Training Schemes for Tourism

Alun Cairns: How many training schemes for tourism does ELWa run? (WAQ27592)

Substantive answer following holding reply issued on 31 July 2003.

Jane Davidson: The term 'scheme' is open to interpretation and, as such, the National Council—ELWa has provided information that covers the following tourism/travel categories: hotel/catering; food/drink services; catering services; hospitality services; leisure/sports facilities work (but not sports generally); country leisure facilities; and arts/culture/heritage administration.

In relation to work-based learning programmes for young people and adults, the figures available for 2002-03 indicate 1,966 starts in tourism-related training. In respect of further education, figures available for 2001-02 specify that 9,640 students pursued tourism-associated qualifications.

Coleg Meirion Dwyfor a Choleg Menai

Alun Ffred Jones: A wnaiff y Gweinidog roi sicrwydd na fydd cwtogi ar gyllid colegau addysg bellach yn y Gogledd-orllewin yn y flwyddyn 2004-05, yn benodol Coleg Meirion Dwyfor a Choleg Menai? (WAQ27700) [W]

Jane Davidson: Bydd Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru yn cyflwyno'i chynigion ar gyfer y gyllideb ddrafft i'w cymeradwyo gan y Cyfarfod Llawn yn yr hydref. Wedi hynny, caiff y Cyngor Cenedlaethol—ELWa ei hysbysu am y ddarpariaeth a wnaed ar ei gyfer yn y gyllideb ar gyfer y flwyddyn honno. Wedyn, yn ei dro, bydd y cyngor yn penderfynu ar y cyllid y bydd yn ei roi i golegau addysg bellach a darparwyr addysg eraill.

Ar hyn o bryd, mae'r cyngor wrthi'n datblygu ei drefniadau cynllunio a chyllido newydd, a bydd yn eu cyflwyno i'r Pwyllgor Addysg a Dysgu Gydol Oes yn ddiweddarach eleni. Caiff y methodolegau cyllido sy'n bodoli eisoes eu defnyddio i ddyrannu cyllid i golegau a darparwyr addysg eraill ar gyfer 2004-05. Er hynny, er mwyn helpu darparwyr i baratoi ar gyfer y fethodoleg gyllido gyffredin newydd a gaiff ei chyflwyno o 2005-06 ymlaen, byddant, ar yr un pryd, yn cael amcan o'r cyllid y byddent yn ei gael pe bai'r fethodoleg newydd yn gymwys ar gyfer 2004-05.

Coleg Meirion Dwyfor and Coleg Menai

Alun Ffred Jones: Will the Minister confirm that no cuts will be made to the funding of further education colleges in north-west Wales in 2004-05, in particular Coleg Meirion Dwyfor and Coleg Menai? (WAQ27700) [W]

Jane Davidson: The Welsh Assembly Government will be presenting its draft budget proposals for Plenary approval in the autumn. Following this, the National Council—ELWa will be notified of its budgetary provision for that year, and the council will then, in turn, determine its prospective funding of further education colleges and other learning providers.

The council is currently developing its new planning and funding arrangements, and will be presenting these to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee later this year. Allocations to colleges and other learning providers for 2004-05 will be on the basis of the existing funding methodologies. However, in order to help them to plan ahead for the introduction of the new common funding methodology that will apply from 2005-06, providers will, at the same time, be given an indication of the funding that they would receive if that new methodology applied immediately in 2004-05.

Cyrsiau Dwyieithog yn 2004-05

Alun Ffred Jones: Sut y mae'r Gweinidog yn bwriadu sicrhau bod cyllid digonol ar gael i golegau sy'n cynnig cyrsiau dwyieithog yn y flwyddyn 2004-05? (WAQ27701) [W]

Jane Davidson: Fe'ch cyfeiriaf at yr ateb a roddais ichi heddiw i WAQ27700.

Mae'r Cyngor Cenedlaethol—ELWa wedi comisiynu ymchwil er mwyn gweld yn union faint yn fwy y mae darparu gwasanaethau dwyieithog yn ei gostio. Disgwylir y bydd canlyniadau'r gwaith ymchwil hwn ar gael yn ystod yr hydref, a bydd y cyngor yn ei gadw mewn cof wrth ddatblygu'i drefniadau cynllunio a chyllido newydd.

Bilingual Courses in 2004-05

Alun Ffred Jones: How does the Minister plan to ensure that there will be sufficient funding available to colleges that offer bilingual courses in 2004-05? (WAQ27701) [W]

Jane Davidson: I refer you to the answer I gave you to WAQ27700 today.

The National Council—ELWa has commissioned research to quantify the additional cost arising from bilingual service provision. The outcome of this research is expected during the autumn and will be taken into account by the council in developing its new planning and funding arrangements.

Children with Special Educational Needs Requirements

Brynle Williams: What measures are in place to financially assist councils in providing extra services owing to a significant influx of children with special educational needs requirements in the middle of the financial year? (WAQ27749)

Jane Davidson: The local government funding formula, through which local education authority budgets are calculated, has an element based on authorities' need to spend on services for special educational needs. The formula does not measure directly the number of children with special educational needs. It does, however, focus on those indicators related to SEN provision and drivers of costs for providing such services. The formula, therefore, takes account of such factors as the number of children within the authority, deprivation factors, such as the number of children in families receiving income support and those in low socio-economic groups, and also an indicator of rurality, namely the additional cost of providing the service over a larger or more rural authority.

The settlement cannot be adjusted during the year to take account of changes in an authority's population. Any changes would be reflected in the following year's settlement. The same principle applies equally to cases where an authority has a reduction in population during the year.

Funding provided through the settlement is non-hypothecated, and it is for individual local authorities to determine how that money is spent in providing such services.

Children with SEN Requirements

Brynle Williams: What plans does the Minister have to introduce measures to financially assist councils in providing extra services owing to a significant influx of children with SEN requirements in the middle of the financial year? (WAQ27750)

Jane Davidson: The Welsh Assembly Government has no plans to amend the mechanism through which local authorities are funded. It is important to recognise, however, that the settlement is non-hypothecated and that it is for individual authorities to determine how their total resources are spent in providing their range of services.

Questions to the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside

Island Farm Planning Application

Alun Cairns: When did the Minister formally inform Bridgend County Borough Council of the decision not to call in the Island Farm planning application? (WAQ27672) *Transferred for answer by the First Minister.*

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): The council was informed of my decision not to call in the Island Farm application for planning permission by letter, dated 21 May 2003.

The Planning Application Process

Alun Cairns: What is the process that a local authority must follow, following a decision by the Assembly not to call in a planning application? (WAQ27674)

The Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Carwyn Jones): Where the Assembly has indicated that it will not be calling in an application for planning permission, it is then for the local planning authority to determine the application on its merits, and to issue its decision in the normal course of business.

Voluntary Modulation

Glyn Davies: Will voluntary modulation continue in Wales after the level of EU-wide compulsory modulation reaches 5 per cent? (WAQ27683)

Glyn Davies: What percentage of the product of voluntary modulation will be guaranteed to be retained in Wales after the EU-wide compulsory modulation scheme becomes a reality at a level lower than the voluntary modulation scheme in Wales? (WAQ27684)

Carwyn Jones: Under the common agricultural policy reform package agreed in June, EU compulsory modulation will be introduced from 2005 at a rate of 3 per cent, rising to 4 per cent in 2006 and 5 per cent from 2007.

Transitional arrangements, the details of which will be set out in draft implementing regulations that are expected to be released by the European Commission in late autumn, will apply to those member states currently applying the voluntary modulation regime. These arrangements will provide an option to levy additional rates of modulation, the proceeds of which would stay with the Member State or region that generated the receipts, to implement current and proposed rural development measures.

In Wales, I am currently consulting on proposals for an entry-level agri-environment scheme, including the use of modulation, supported by match funding, to meet the costs involved.

Monitoring the Water Quality of Shellfish Waters

Lisa Francis: Following the proposed Swansea University study (April 2002) into water quality monitoring of shellfish waters, can you confirm that the National Assembly for Wales can match fund South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee's funding application for Objective 1 to the value of £80,000, which will go towards evaluating the waters in the Burry inlet? (WAQ27685)

Carwyn Jones: This application would fall under the financial instrument for fisheries guidance arrangements and would be subject to approval by the Welsh European Funding Office. WEFO is aware of the project but has yet to receive a formal application. Under the FIFG rules, the Welsh Assembly Government is obliged to provide a financial contribution towards the cost of an approved project.

Grants to Cymdeithas Tai Cantref

Glyn Davies: What Welsh Office (pre-May 1999)/National Assembly for Wales grants have been made to Cymdeithas Tai Cantref in respect of social housing built adjacent to Llynloedd Lane, Machynlleth, and was a certificate of completion issued by the planning authority before payment was made in full? (WAQ27686)

Carwyn Jones: The 22 units of social housing at Llynloedd Lane, Machynlleth, (formerly known as the Capel Norton site) received a total of £566,930 in social housing grant. Planning authorities do not issue certificates of completion, although building control officers issue completion certificates in respect of compliance with building regulations.

In respect of this particular development, Powys County Council is unwilling to adopt the road adjacent to the development, and Cymdeithas Tai Cantref is technically in breach of the original planning consent. In its defence, this is a dispute between a local resident and the land registry that initially advised Cymdeithas Tai Cantref. It is understood that negotiations are ongoing between the land registry and a private individual regarding the ownership of a small parcel of land essential to the completion of the development. Powys County Council is aware of the situation and is satisfied that the association is not at fault.

Social Housing

Glyn Davies: What requirement does the National Assembly Government demand from recipients of public support for the provision of social housing to ensure that developments have been completed and comply fully with planning conditions before public money is paid out in full? (WAQ27687)

Carwyn Jones: The National Assembly Government's social housing grant procedures state that detailed planning consent must be obtained prior to the signing of building contracts, to enable registered social landlords to develop the appropriate and relevant scheme before scheme approval is issued.

It is the responsibility of the local authority's planning enforcement officer to ensure that all planning requirements are met. Any additional expenditure incurred by registered social landlords as a result of non-compliance would not be grant funded. In circumstances where it is found that registered social

landlords have deliberately ignored the social housing grant conditions, they may be required to repay all or some of the grant entitlement for that scheme.

Planning Conditions to Protect Third Parties

Glyn Davies: What legal requirements exist to ensure that planning authorities enforce planning conditions in order to protect the interests of third parties from developers causing damage to their property rights? (WAQ27688)

Carwyn Jones: Normally, property rights of third parties fall outside the planning system. However, section 172 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 enables local planning authorities to exercise enforcement powers in relation to planning conditions if they consider it expedient to do so, having regard to the development plan and other material considerations. This is discretionary; there is no mandatory requirement. Any particular case in which enforcement action might be thought appropriate should be referred to the relevant local planning authority.

The Island Farm Development

Alun Cairns: Further to the response to OAQ26673, can the Minister confirm whether the advice published was edited in any way, and if so, why and what elements were deleted/amended? (WAQ27697)
Transferred for answer by the First Minister.

The First Minister: The advice has not been edited in any way for the purposes of publication.

Cyfarwyddeb Ewrop ar Ddifa Anifeiliaid

Alun Ffred Jones: A fydd Llywodraeth y Cynulliad yn ceisio sicrhau amrywio'r diffiniad o 'remoteness' yng nghyd-destun cyfarwyddeb Ewrop ar ddifa anifeiliaid i gynnwys mynydd-dir uchel Cymru? (WAQ27733) [W]

Carwyn Jones: Er mwyn perswadio'r comisiwn i ddiwygio rheoliad yr UE, bydd angen i aelod wladwriaethau gasglu tystiolaeth am unrhyw anawsterau ymarferol y maent wedi'u hwynebu wrth geisio rhoi'r rheoliad ar waith. Bydd Llywodraeth y Cynulliad yn casglu unrhyw wybodaeth y mae'n ei derbyn ar fater 'remoteness' ac, os gwelir bod angen, bydd yn cyflwyno achos i Adran yr Amgylchedd, Bwyd a Materion Gwledig er mwyn trafod â'r comisiwn maes o law.

The European Directive on the Culling of Animals

Alun Ffred Jones: Will the Welsh Assembly Government be attempting to vary the definition of 'remoteness' in the context of the European directive on the culling of animals to include the uplands of Wales? (WAQ27733) [W]

Carwyn Jones: In order to persuade the commission to amend the EU regulation, member states will need to gather evidence about any practical difficulties that they are encountering in its implementation. The Assembly Government will collate any information that it receives on the 'remoteness' issue and, if necessary, present a case to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for negotiations with the commission in due course.

Cyfarwyddeb Ewrop ar Ddifa Anifeiliaid

Alun Ffred Jones: A yw Llywodraeth y Cynulliad wedi ceisio dylanwadu ar ddiffiniad Adran yr Amgylchedd, Bwyd a Materion Gwledig o 'remoteness' yng nghyd-destun cyfarwyddeb Ewrop ar ddifa anifeiliaid? (WAQ27734) [W]

Carwyn Jones: Ydy.

The European Directive on the Culling of Animals

Alun Ffred Jones: Has the Welsh Assembly Government attempted to influence the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs's definition of 'remoteness' in the context of the European directive on the culling of animals? (WAQ27734) [W]

Carwyn Jones: Yes.

Questions to the Finance Minister

The Date of Local Elections

Laura Anne Jones: Further to WAQ27644, would the Minister explain the delay in announcing the date of local elections? (WAQ27721)

The Finance Minister (Sue Essex): There are a number of issues to be taken into account in considering whether to combine the local and European elections. On the one hand, there is the desirability of having elections broadly confined to one level of government at a time: on the other, voters might well prefer to avoid two polling days in close succession.

A particular issue is that local authorities have the option of applying to run electoral pilots in experimental voting methods. That option is not currently open if the local elections were to be combined with European Parliament elections. The Lord Chancellor is currently considering the introduction of legislation that would permit pilots at European, or combined local and European, elections.

You will appreciate that this could have a bearing on my decision which, in any case, needs to be taken soon.

Access to Polling Stations for Disabled People

Laura Anne Jones: What plans has the Minister got to improve access to polling stations for disabled people in time for local government elections in 2004? (WAQ27730)

Sue Essex: Direct responsibility for the conduct of local elections lies with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. However, I recently met with representatives of Scope and the Disability Rights Commission to discuss the Polls Apart survey on accessibility at the Assembly elections, which had raised a number of areas requiring attention. The Electoral Commission will, no doubt, comment on accessibility issues on May's Assembly elections in its report due in October. Once that report is published, I will certainly be keen to work with the disability organisations, the Electoral Commission and local authorities to improve accessibility for the 2004 elections. This will build on the considerable efforts made in advance of the Assembly elections, such as paying for ramps, providing blind voting devices and paying for the training of elections staff.

Information Technology Services for the New Assembly Building

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister provide a breakdown of the cost of providing information technology services for the new Assembly building? (WAQ27776)

Sue Essex: These costs must remain commercially confidential, as a competitive procurement process is to be undertaken for the procurement of information and communications technology equipment. Some elements of ICT will also form part of the Merlin project, for which a competitive procurement process is currently being undertaken.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Assembly Election Manifesto

Alun Cairns: When does the Minister expect to achieve the health targets set out in her party's 1999 Assembly election manifesto? (WAQ27679)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): Most of those manifesto commitments were delivered successfully during the first Assembly. A small number of those commitments proved difficult to achieve within the indicated timescale, though progress has been made in targeted areas. I have kept the Health and Social Services Committee informed of progress and timescales.

Rheumatology Services

Lisa Francis: Can the Minister confirm whether waiting times in Wales for orthopaedic treatment are increasing because of the lack of rheumatology services? (WAQ27692)

Jane Hutt: Rheumatology conditions, including arthritis, are potentially debilitating and distressing conditions affecting many people. However, while there is a shortage of rheumatology provision in Wales, there is no demonstrable link between this shortage and the length of waiting times. Indeed, recent reductions in outpatient waiting times for orthopaedics suggest that long waiting times in orthopaedics may be more affected by outpatient working practices than by shortages within rheumatology.

Patients with Dementia

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister outline what services and treatments are available for patients with dementia? (WAQ27694)

Jane Hutt: It is the duty of the local health boards, together with their partners, to consider local needs and priorities and to allocate the available resources to services such as those for patients with dementia. The national service framework for older people will aim to raise the profile of mental health in older people and to treat and support those older people with dementia.

There are various treatments available for dementia, including new drug entities for the treatment of moderate to severe dementia. The effectiveness of these new medicines will be considered by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in December 2003.

Medicines used for the treatment of dementia should only be initiated and supervised by a specialist experienced in the management of dementia.

Ebixa for Patients with Dementia

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on the availability and prescription of the ebixa to patients with dementia? (WAQ27695)

Jane Hutt: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is set to consider memantine (ebixa) in December 2003 and to publish the final technical appraisal for May 2005. In the interim, consultants have to make clinical decisions based on the current evidence available. It is a matter of clinical judgment for the consultant specialist concerned as to who would benefit from treatment. Local health boards and national health service trusts have a responsibility to provide treatments, which meet the needs of their patients.

NICE Guidance in Relation to Dementia Drugs

Brynle Williams: What measures are in place to ensure that Welsh NHS trusts apply NICE guidance in relation to dementia drugs? (WAQ27696)

Jane Hutt: Welsh health circular (2002) 24, issued on 28 February 2002, entitled 'Directions to Health Authorities and NHS Trusts in Wales to fund implementation of NICE Technology Appraisal Guidance' provided the statutory requirement for health authorities to ensure that acceptable arrangements are in place to fund the implementation of all NICE appraisal guidance issued since 26 February 1999. New directions will be issued shortly to reflect the change from health authorities to local health boards.

Care Home Closures

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on the number of care home closures in Wales since January 2002? (WAQ27711)

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on care home closures in South Wales East since January 2002? (WAQ27712)

Jane Hutt: Between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2003, there was a net loss of 595 care home places in Wales, representing a reduction of some 2 per cent of the total number of registered places. By comparison, the net reduction in registered places in South Wales East for the same period was some 1 per cent.

Across Wales in 2002-03, 104 homes closed with a loss of 784 places, and 18 homes opened with a gain of 189 places. Of the closures, five (47 places) were in the South Wales East region.

Between 1 January 2002 and 31 March 2002, there was a net reduction of 14 care homes (174 places) across Wales and a net reduction in South Wales East of seven homes (81 places).

Care Home Closures

Laura Anne Jones: What plans does the Minister have to prevent further care home closures in South Wales East? (WAQ27713)

Laura Anne Jones: What provisions are in place to prevent further care home closures in South Wales East? (WAQ27714)

Jane Hutt: The legal responsibility for planning, providing or commissioning care services rests with local authorities, which have a duty to ensure that appropriate community care services are provided.

The Welsh Assembly Government has a strategic role in helping to ensure that a range of services are in place to support vulnerable people, working in partnership with users, carers, commissioners and providers.

Specific actions taken or planned at that strategic level include:

- statutory guidance to local authorities so that their commissioning and contracting practices recognise the impact that commissioning practices have on care providers;
- funding an initiative by the Welsh Local Government Association to provide local authorities with a framework, enabling them to take into account providers' costs in local fee negotiations;
- additional funding for local authorities to recognise the pressures on care services, and to help to tackle delayed transfers of care;
- new operational guidance on the enforcement of physical standards and a review of the physical and administrative standards affecting small care homes; and

- addressing workforce issues through a task group and some additional funding to support action flowing from the group's work.

Fall in the Number of Beds in the NHS

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister explain why the total number of beds in the NHS has fallen since 2000? (WAQ27715)

Jane Hutt: Between 1998-99 and 2001-02, the number of daily available beds in NHS Wales was reduced from 14,897 to 14,434. The overall reduction is a reflection of the success of policies to reduce mental health and learning disability beds, which fell from 3,121 to 2,752 in the same period.

The total daily available acute beds increased from 9,078 in 1998-99 to 9,419 in 2001-02. Some of this increase may be as a result of the reclassification of beds in geriatric medicine to acute medical sector beds.

NHS Recruitment Rates

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister explain why managers are being recruited to the NHS in Wales at a faster rate than nurses? (WAQ27716)

Jane Hutt: The number of nurses in NHS Wales, both qualified and unqualified, has increased by 6,430 between 1997 and 2002. During the same period, the number of NHS managers in the administration and estates group has increased by 293.

Managers play a key role in ensuring that frontline clinical services are delivered efficiently and effectively. Staff in the administration group are being employed to support clinical staff so that clinical staff time can be freed up to have increased patient contact. Some of the increase in managers can also be attributed to the introduction of clinical governance, increased information management and technology infrastructures and government-driven initiatives to benefit all staff, including equality in the workplace, recruitment and retention strategies and flexible employment policies.

There is no ceiling set on the numbers of managers employed, but the Welsh Assembly Government will continue to seek to keep overall management costs under control.

NHS Waiting Lists

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister explain how Wales compares with other European countries in terms of NHS waiting lists? (WAQ27717)

Jane Hutt: Information on waiting lists in other European countries is not held centrally.

Rising Waiting Lists

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister explain why waiting lists have risen since 1999 despite funding increases to the NHS in Wales? (WAQ27719)

Jane Hutt: The problems that we have faced in tackling waiting times are deep-rooted, arising from past underfunding and lack of expansion of medical training places. The recent Wanless report has highlighted the difficulties of protecting elective surgery and treatment from disruption by higher priority emergency treatment needs. The solutions that we are implementing are designed to be sustainable. Our policies, particularly through the innovations in care programme, are having an impact both in reducing waiting times and in modernising the way that services are delivered throughout Wales. Since the waiting times strategy was announced, significant investment has been made in reducing waiting times, which have led to particularly marked improvements in the key priority areas, such as cardiac and orthopaedic surgery.

Self-funding Residents in Nursing Homes (Assembly Contribution)

David Davies: What is the current Assembly contribution for those who are self-funding residents in nursing homes in Wales? (WAQ27731)

Jane Hutt: The current Assembly contribution is £100 per resident per week.

Self-funding Residents in Nursing Homes

David Davies: When will the Assembly contribution for those who are self-funding residents in nursing homes in Wales next be raised? (WAQ27732)

Jane Hutt: The NHS-funded nursing care contribution will be reviewed prior to 1 April 2004, when the policy for NHS funding of the nursing component of care in care homes is extended to local authority-supported residents, in addition to self-funders.

Waiting Lists for Tonsillectomies in Gwent

David Davies: Will the Minister authorise extra resources for the Gwent health area until the build-up in waiting lists for tonsillectomies is reduced to a normal level? (WAQ27744)

Jane Hutt: NHS Wales has been set a target for 2003-04 to ensure that no patient is waiting more than 18 months for a tonsillectomy procedure by the end of March 2004. In recognition of the fact that these procedures were suspended while safety concerns were addressed, I announced, at the Health and Social Services Committee on 16 July 2003, that central funding would be made available to assist in achieving this target. Discussions are underway currently with each health community to identify how those who have waited the longest could be treated. A tonsillectomy project has been established, informed from a clinical perspective by a group of ear, nose and throat surgeons, to oversee this reduction in waiting times. Some patients will be treated through the regular ear, nose and throat operating lists and others through special initiatives. At this stage, I have not confirmed the additional funding that the Gwent area will require to achieve the target.

Medical Negligence Claims to NHS Wales

Leanne Wood: Will the Minister outline the costs of medical negligence claims to NHS Wales during the last financial year? (WAQ27766)

Leanne Wood: Will the Minister detail the cost of medical negligence claims to NHS Wales over the past four financial years? (WAQ27767)

Jane Hutt: The costs of medical negligence claims over the last four financial years are:

2002-03	£117.8 million
2001-02	£73.3 million
2000-01	£66.4 million
1999-2000	£63.3 million

Source: annual accounts of health authorities and NHS trusts, 1999-2000 to 2002-03 .

The costs include the award to the claimant, the legal costs of the claimant and the health body and the insurance premium paid to the Welsh risk pool.

Local Health Boards' Inherited Budget Deficits

Leanne Wood: Will the Minister name the local health boards that have inherited budget deficits from their predecessors? (WAQ27769)

Leanne Wood: What is the total inherited budget deficit for each local health board? (WAQ27770)

Jane Hutt: Local health boards in some health communities have not yet completed the process of disaggregating the financial commitments entered into by the former health authorities to individual health board level. The Welsh Assembly Government is closely monitoring the progress of finalising this disaggregation, which is being managed through the service and financial framework process. Until this process is complete, it is not possible to confirm which local health boards have inherited deficits from the former health authorities. However, four of the former health authorities (Bro Taf, Gwent, Dyfed Powys and Iechyd Morgannwg) had identified an underlying financial deficit during 2002-03, and it is assumed that all the local health boards succeeding these authorities will have a share of this underlying deficit in 2003-04. The local health boards involved are Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Vale of Glamorgan, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Powys, Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea.

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration

All-Wales Drug Education Programme

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on the all-Wales drug education programme and the involvement of DARE? (WAQ27772)

The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (Edwina Hart): The all-Wales schools programme consists of three strands: substance misuse, social behaviour and community and safety. As part of the roll-out of the programme across Wales, it is expected that the programme co-ordinators will work in partnership with bodies representing the three strands above. This programme is not intended to replace existing educational programmes covering these areas.

'Arrive Alive'

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on how the proceeds of fines from the Assembly-sponsored 'Arrive Alive' campaign have been spent? (WAQ27773)

Edwina Hart: Fines received from offending motorists are used to finance the 'Arrive Alive' initiative and extend it to other roads in north Wales, where speed contributes to collisions. Any surplus funds collected go to the central Government consolidated fund.

'Arrive Alive' Campaign (North Wales)

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on how successful the Assembly-sponsored 'Arrive Alive' (north Wales) campaign is, compared with 'Arrive Alive' campaigns in other areas of Wales and the UK? (WAQ27774)

Edwina Hart: It is too early to make an assessment of the success of the 'Arrive Alive' initiative, as it only commenced in October 2001. However, early indications are that the initiative is contributing to road safety, with accident figures reducing along the targeted routes. Fatal injuries are down 38 per cent, serious injuries are down by 34 per cent, and slight injuries are down by 17 per cent.

Direct comparisons with other areas are not possible given the varying nature of road networks and topography etc. The accident reduction figures quoted above are of a similar order to those obtained in a

two-year pilot study across eight areas (including south Wales), which preceded the 'Arrive Alive' project. This study gave a 35 per cent reduction for killed and seriously injured casualties.

The Department for Transport values the cost of a fatality to the community at £1 million.

Strategy to Combat Poverty

Laura Anne Jones: What targets are in place to measure improvements in the Government's strategy to combat poverty? (WAQ27928)

Edwina Hart: 'Plan for Wales 2001' sets social inclusion and attacking poverty as one of the guiding principles of the Welsh Assembly Government. The third annual report on social inclusion in Wales demonstrates how that guiding principle has influenced our policies and programmes over the past year, and fulfils our commitment to report regularly on what we are achieving in tackling poverty and social disadvantage. The third annual report includes a summary of robust and quantifiable indicators at the end of key chapters and against which progress can be tracked. This report can be accessed on the Assembly's website at: www.wales.gov.uk/themessocialdeprivation/content/keydocs-e.htm

Tackling Drugs in South Wales East

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on the Government's progress in tackling drugs in South Wales East? (WAQ27929)

Edwina Hart: I am carrying on with the work that I started last year, focusing on the four key aims of the Welsh substance misuse strategy. Responsibility for substance misuse issues passed to the 22 community safety partnerships on 1 April this year, and they are expected to produce plans to tackle substance misuse that will take account of the specific needs of their areas. I have increased the drug and alcohol budget to nearly £20 million over the period 2003-06. From this, an additional £1.2 million has already been allocated to the south Wales and Gwent area for this financial year. Given that the new arrangements have only been in place since April, it is too early to point to detailed benefits just yet.