

Answers issued to Members on 5 May 2009

[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 Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How many applications have been submitted to date since the launch of the ProAct scheme? (WAQ53948)

The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Hutt): 139 applications to the ProAct scheme have been received to date all of which have gone through a ProAct panel.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How many applications have been approved to date since the launch of the ProAct scheme and what is the total value of funding? (WAQ53949)

Jane Hutt: 40 completed training plans have been approved to date representing a total of £5.6m.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How many applications have been rejected to date since the launch of the ProAct scheme? (WAQ53950)

Jane Hutt: 12 applications have been rejected by the ProAct panels to date. An additional 33 have queries which need to be resolved before the application could be progressed.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What is the average period applicants have to wait for a decision on funding under the ProAct scheme? (WAQ53951)

Jane Hutt: Once the training plan and associated documents have been completed appropriately the average number of days they wait for a decision is one.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What is the longest period an applicant has had to wait for a decision on funding under the ProAct scheme? (WAQ53952)

Jane Hutt: The time an applicant waits for a decision on the funding they will receive depends completely on the training plan and associated documents being submitted appropriately. The longest period an applicant has waited from completed application was 9 days.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How many redundant workers have so far been helped under the ReAct scheme since it was launched in November 2008? (WAQ53958)

Jane Hutt: 4,463 redundant workers have accessed ReAct support since the launch of the current programme on 1 October 2008.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How much money has been provided in grant support to redundant workers under the ReAct scheme since it was launched in November 2008? (WAQ53959)

Jane Hutt: £8,537,453 of grants have been committed and £3,152,519 has been paid since the launch of the current programme on 1 October 2008.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How many employers have taken on redundant workers under the ReAct scheme since it was launched in November 2008? (WAQ53960)

Jane Hutt: 466 employers have accessed the ReAct wage subsidy to employ a redundant worker since the launch of the current programme on 1 October 2008.

Mark Isherwood (North Wales): Why was the decision taken to cut funding to Canolfan Tryweryn Creche? (WAQ53986)

Jane Hutt: Gwynedd County Council has provided funding for childcare through Cymorth and Flying Start and this has been the sole funding for the Tŷ Tryweryn Centre.

The Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) in Gwynedd has identified through their CYPP plans that parenting is a key priority. They have booked childcare at Tŷ Tryweryn to enable parents to attend parenting courses. The service provided at the centre was valued by the partnership and they wished for this to continue. Indeed, assistance was offered to Tŷ Tryweryn by the partnership in diversifying this service and suggestions provided in ways of generating income. Tŷ Tryweryn felt that this was not the way forward for them and decided to close the facility.

Paul Davies (Preseli Pembrokeshire): For each of the last 5 years, how many times have police been called to schools in Wales? (WAQ53997)

Jane Hutt: These data are not held centrally by the Welsh Assembly Government or by the Home Office.

Paul Davies (Preseli Pembrokeshire): How many pupils are in 6th form education in comparison to 10 years ago? (WAQ53999)

Jane Hutt: The number of pupils in sixth forms in maintained secondary schools, for 1998 and 2008, is in the table below.

Pupils in sixth forms in maintained secondary schools

Year	Total number of pupils on role	Total number of pupils in sixth forms	Percentage of total pupils in sixth forms
1998	201,852	23,915	11.8
2008	206,936	28,080	13.6

Source: School Census

Ann Jones (Vale of Clwyd): What discussions has the Minister had with local authorities in Wales to ensure match funding is in place for the £250,000 committed to extending play opportunities for disabled children? (WAQ54003)

Jane Hutt: We are in discussions with the Welsh Local Government Association regarding the funding of £250,000 committed to extending play opportunities for disabled children.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What was the cost of the school breakfast scheme for the last year? (WAQ54008)

Jane Hutt: Figures for 2008-09 have not yet been finalised. Based on current information we anticipate total spend for the primary school free breakfast initiative for 2008-09 to be £8.7m.

Questions to the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the Minister make a statement on what steps she is taking to ensure that all planning applications are dealt with in accordance with Welsh Assembly Governments targets? (WAQ53992)

The Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing (Jane Davidson): The Assembly Government recommends that 80% of planning applications should be determined within eight weeks. The current average across Welsh planning authorities is 60%. We are currently focusing on the weakest authorities and advice from the Wales Audit Office indicates that their performance is gradually improving.

I have previously outlined the Assembly Government's commitment to streamlining the planning application process and we will shortly be commissioning research which will identify common difficulties within the system, together with best practice from which other authorities can learn. This evidence will inform future work to improve the process and increase the overall speed of handling planning applications.

Questions to the Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What proportion of Welsh Assembly Government payments to contractors are paid within 10 days in each month since the commitment was made in the second economic summit of 6 November 2008? (WAQ53954)

The Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery (Andrew Davies): Based on the information recorded by departments across WAG, the proportion of payments made to contractors each month are as follows:

November 2008	94.9%
December 2008	90.3%
January 2009	93.8%
February 2009	95.8%
March 2009	95.6%

Figures for April 2009 are not available at the time of writing (1 May 2009), but we will continue to monitor performance against the new target.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister give details of the amount per square metre of vacant office space belonging to the Welsh Assembly Government and Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies? (WAQ54004)

Andrew Davies: Vacant office space on the Welsh Assembly Government's administrative estate is 782 square metres. This equates to approximately 0.7% of the administrative estate.

Information is not currently held centrally for Assembly Government Sponsored Bodies.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What is the estimated cost of maintaining vacant property belonging to the Welsh Assembly Government and ASPBs in the last financial year? (WAQ54005)

Andrew Davies: The total annual building running cost (including maintenance) of vacant office space on the Welsh Assembly Government's administrative estate for 2008/09 was £188,000. Opportunities to re-use or dispose of this space have been identified.

Information is not currently held centrally for Assembly Government Sponsored Bodies.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How much new office space has been created in the last financial year by the Welsh Assembly Government and ASPBs? (WAQ54006)

Andrew Davies: In 2008/09 a total of approximately 330 square metres of new office space was acquired and fitted out at Bocam Park, Bridgend for CAFCASS Cymru. This replaced unsuitable leasehold space in the town, improving facilities for the public served in the locality. The Welsh Assembly Government is currently in the process of disposing of this surplus property interest.

Information is not currently held centrally for Assembly Government Sponsored Bodies.

Questions to the Minister for Heritage

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on the financial position of the National Botanic Garden for the last year for which figures are available? (WAQ54020)

The Minister for Heritage (Alun Ffred Jones): For reasons of commercial confidentiality it would not be appropriate to comment in detail on the National Botanic Garden's financial position.

The very poor weather over recent summers has created cash-flow pressures, which are reflected in the Garden's audited accounts for the year-ending 31 March 2008. To help the Garden to overcome these pressures, I recently agreed to vary the Assembly Government's current 3-year revenue funding agreement to bring forward a portion of the funds due in 2010/11 into 2008/09.

The Garden is confident that this will enable it to fully implement its Business Plan for the coming year. Also, in the latter part of 2008, the Garden carried out a major restructuring and cost cutting exercise, the benefits of which are now beginning to show through.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What financial assistance is the Welsh Assembly Government proposing to provide to the National Botanic Garden for this year and the next two years? (WAQ54021)

Alun Ffred Jones: The Welsh Assembly Government will provide the Garden with £550,000 in revenue funding in 2009/10, and £350,000 in 2010/11. In return, the Garden is required to deliver a series of outcomes, including an educational programme, and a programme of scientific and horticultural research.

The funding is provided under the terms of a 3 year agreement which began in April 2008. Any financial assistance to the Garden in 2011/12 and after would be dependent on the outcome of an independent review of the Garden's medium and longer term revenue requirements.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on the financial position of the Wales Millennium Centre for the last year for which figures are available? (WAQ54022)

Alun Ffred Jones: For reasons of commercial confidentiality it would not be appropriate to comment in detail on WMC's financial position. The audit of WMC's statutory accounts for the year ending 31 December 2008 is currently being finalised and the accounts will be available from July. Following the

enhanced revenue support the Welsh Assembly Government has provided to WMC, and in spite of the current adverse economic environment, I am pleased to report that the Centre is currently financially stable.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What financial assistance is the Welsh Assembly Government proposing to provide to the Wales Millennium Centre for this year and the next two years? (WAQ54023)

Alun Ffred Jones: The Welsh Assembly Government under the three year revenue funding agreement starting in April 2008 has undertaken to provide the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC) with revenue support of £3.7 million a year for 2009/10 and 2010/11. In return WMC is required to deliver outcomes related to its role as a world class theatre and arts centre and to meet a tough package of financial controls and targets. The Assembly Government is also in discussions with WMC about providing a financial contribution to the Centre's capital costs for this period. Any financial assistance to WMC after 2010/11 would be dependent on the outcome of a review of the Centre's medium and longer term revenue and capital funding requirements.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister list the libraries that have closed in each year since 2000? (WAQ54026)

Alun Ffred Jones: The information as requested is not available.

Please see the table below which outlines the number of public library branches per authority, including mobile libraries, from 2000-01 to 2007-08. The figures are taken from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Public Library Statistics, which is the main annual statistical publication for public libraries. Copies are available in the Welsh Assembly Government's library.

Table: Number of branch libraries in Wales by authority (includes mobiles and branches open for fewer than 10 hours a week)

Authority	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Blaenau Gwent	9	9	9	9	9	7	7	7
Bridgend	15	15	17	18	18	18	17	17
Caerphilly	23	23	23	23	-	22	22	22
Cardiff	22	22	22	22	20	22	22	22
Carmarthenshire	40	40	40	38	39	39	37	36
Ceredigion	14	13	13	13	13	12	13	13
Conwy	15	-	-	15	15	14	14	14
Denbighshire	10	10	10	10	-	-	8	-
Flintshire	24	24	24	24	24	19	20	36
Gwynedd	21	21	21	21	21	20	21	21
Isle of Anglesey	13	13	-	13	13	13	13	-
Merthyr Tydfil	5	5	5	-	-	5	7	7
Monmouthshire	9	9	9	9	9	8	8	8
Neath Port Talbot	23	21	23	19	19	-	20	20
Newport	12	13	13	13	-	10	11	11
Pembrokeshire	17	17	17	14	17	17	17	17
Powys	-	-	23	23	23	23	23	23
Rhondda Cynon Taff	33	36	36	36	-	36	36	36

Swansea	21	21	21	21	-	20	21	20
Torfaen	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Vale of Glamorgan	11	11	11	11	11	-	9	11
Wrexham	14	13	13	13	-	-	12	-

Notes

The figures are from Public Library Statistics CIPFA Actuals, which are based on returns provided by the local authorities. Some authorities did not complete returns in some years as shown with the notation '-'.

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What recent discussions has the Welsh Assembly Government had with the UK Treasury with regard to business rates? (WAQ53956)

The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government (Brian Gibbons): The Treasury has confirmed that the Assembly Government has to fund any reductions in business rates that the UK Government does not fund in England. Welsh Ministers have discussed business rates with the UK Government and it has agreed to fund relief for unoccupied properties with a rateable value up to £15,000 in 2009-2010, and to allow ratepayers to defer 60% of the general 2009-2010 business rates increase over the next 2 financial years.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What consideration has the Welsh Assembly Government made to exempting small businesses with a rateable value of under £10,000 from business rates? (WAQ53957)

Brian Gibbons: I have recently implemented in full the Assembly Government's One Wales commitment to enhance rates relief for small businesses and £20 million is available to fund this. The proposal for a £10,000 exemption threshold would cost up to an additional £70 million which would have to be met by reducing Assembly Government resources for other priorities.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What support is available to public houses that provide community services in Wales? (WAQ54018)

Brian Gibbons: There is a scheme known as 'Pub is the Hub' run by an independent advisory trust. This has been established to improve the community value of pubs by funding additional uses for them.

The Welsh Assembly Government awarded a grant of £16,000 to the 'Pub is the Hub' to undertake a research project to identify the potential for introducing the scheme in Wales.

So far in Wales, Pub is the Hub has part financed part of a project that will enable communities in rural Denbighshire to look for innovative ways to ensure rural pubs remain relevant to the needs of their local communities.

In addition, Welsh Assembly Government funding is available to support post offices including those located within pubs.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What consideration is the Welsh Assembly Government giving to the policy of charging a minimum price per unit of alcohol? (WAQ54032)

Brian Gibbons: In the Welsh Assembly Government's new 10 year strategy for tackling substance misuse 'Working Together to Reduce Harm' we state that would like to see the introduction of minimum pricing as one measure to reduce alcohol related harm.

We are currently looking at the scope of the Government of Wales Act 2006 in relation to a range of measures in relation to alcohol and we continue to press the UK Government to legislate on a range of measures to help tackle alcohol related harm.