

Written Questions answered between 9 and 16 November 2006

[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

Laura Anne Jones: How is the Welsh Assembly Government working with other Government bodies to enhance sporting opportunities in Wales? (WAQ48463)

The Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport (Alun Pugh): The Welsh Assembly Government recognises the important role that local authorities across Wales are playing in the delivery of the aims and objectives of 'Climbing Higher'.

Through the Sports Council for Wales, we are developing our advocacy and support role with local authorities on the provision of appropriate physical infrastructure and human resources in local communities. The design of future sport and physical activity opportunities will need to take account of the recommendations of the Beecham review of local service delivery to meet the evolving needs of Wales's citizens.

Questions to the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on how fuel supplies will be supplied to Wylfa post 2010? (WAQ45963)

Substantive answer following holding reply

The Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks (Andrew Davies): You may be interested to know that the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, which has been looking at the continuity of fuel supply to Wylfa as part of the review to explore the options for extending the operational life of the station, has reported today. Its report can be accessed through the NDA internet site at http://www.nda.gov.uk/documents/wylfa_report_redacted.pdf

Carl Sargeant: Will the Minister make a statement on the progress made by the Welsh Assembly Government towards its road casualty reduction targets? (WAQ48425)

Andrew Davies: We are making good progress towards achieving the 2010 casualty reduction targets. The 2005 casualty figures show that we have already met the 50 per cent reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured and we are over three quarters of the way towards the target of a 40 per cent reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured. We have also exceeded the target of a 10 per cent reduction in the rate of people slightly injured, per 100 million vehicle kilometres.

Nick Bourne: What criteria were used to determine who should visit the Ryder Cup in Ireland at the Welsh Assembly Government's expense? (WAQ48450)

Andrew Davies: Officials and guests attending the Ryder Cup in Ireland at the Welsh Assembly Government's expense were determined by the following criteria, on their ability to:

impact on the economic development of Wales;

bring investment to Wales;

increase golfing and hotel resources in Wales;

increase international golfing tourism to Wales;

raise Wales's international profile;

provide significant relevant and positive international public relations opportunities for Wales;

become an international ambassador for Wales;

help deliver a successful 2010 Ryder Cup:

sponsor RCW or its partners;

bring other international events to Wales;

raise profile of and/or leverage benefits to Newport (including event logistics);

learn from the 2006 event;

arrange Team Wales events in Ireland.

Questions to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Nick Bourne: What discussions has the Minister had with the UK Government on devolving teachers' pay to Wales? (WAQ48449)

The Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Davidson): None. When I gave evidence in September to the school teachers' review body, I made it clear that there were no current proposals aimed at devolving responsibility for teachers' pay and conditions to Wales.

Nick Bourne: What was the cost of producing the document 'The Learning Country: Vision into Action', and to whom is the document being sent? (WAQ48454)

Jane Davidson: The total cost of producing 'The Learning Country: Vision into Action' is £15,747. The document will be distributed to all key stakeholders, including schools, colleges and universities, local authorities, trade unions, the business and voluntary sectors.

Janet Ryder: Does the Welsh Assembly Government's capital expenditure programme on new school buildings have inbuilt enhance energy efficiency standard? (WAQ48462)

Jane Davidson: As a condition of grant under the Assembly Government's school buildings improvement grant, local authorities are required to have regard for the Building Research Establishment's environmental assessment method school standards, for all new school projects, significant refurbishments and extensions.

Nick Bourne: Does the Assembly's education budget include funds to help schools damaged by arson? (WAQ48465)

Jane Davidson: No. It is for local authorities to insure against the possibility of arson and other

damage to their schools along with their other building stock. If local authorities wish to make additional capital investment, out of their allocation from the Assembly, it would be legitimate expenditure.

Nick Bourne: What action does the Minister intend to take to ensure that the education of children at Mary Immaculate RC Primary School in Haverfordwest is not disrupted by the recent fire? (WAQ48466)

Jane Davidson: It is for the local education authority and the school to decide on the most appropriate way of ensuring that the education of the pupils is not disrupted following the fire. I understand that they are in discussion about appropriate measures to ensure the continuing education of the pupils. Work on the new, replacement school building for Mary Immaculate RC Primary School, which is being grant aided under the Assembly Government's voluntary aided schools capital programme, should be completed by the end of this month.

Lisa Francis: Would the Minister make a statement on the number of adults learning Welsh in Wales? (WAQ48467)

Jane Davidson: In 2005-06, there were 25,465 enrolments on Welsh for adults courses and 17,030 individual learners. Welsh for adults has a particularly important role to play in achieving the Assembly Government's role of a bilingual Wales and it is currently being restructured with the aim of achieving higher levels of fluent learners.

The first phase of the restructuring is the establishment of six dedicated language centres, which will concentrate mainly on the way that Welsh for adults is planned on a regional level, and the way in which provision will be funded through the new centres from 2007. The restructuring will enable capacity building, better quality assurance, improved marketing and better progression by learners from one level to the next. The aim is to achieve higher levels of learners achieving fluency. The centres will also provide training and career opportunities for tutors and will provide learners with improved support and advice. The six centres will be formally launched at a Welsh for adults conference on 17 November. This will be a training event and an opportunity for best practice to be shared in the field.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Lisa Francis: What assurances can the Minister give that multiple sclerosis patients will be able to receive the DMT drugs that they need? (WAQ48470)

Lisa Francis: Can the Minister confirm that, as a result of the additional funding for disease

modifying therapies, announced on 30 October 2006, that all MS patients in Wales will have access to the drugs their doctors prescribe for their condition? (WAQ48475)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Brian Gibbons): The additional £700,000 funding that has been made available for disease modifying therapies will allow the prescribing centres commissioned by Health Commission Wales to commence treatment of Welsh MS patients who had previously been assessed as eligible for treatment, and any new patients who present for the remainder of 2006-07.

Lisa Francis: Would the Minister make a statement on the performance of out-of-hours services in Mid and West Wales? (WAQ48471)

Brian Gibbons: Out-of-hours services in Mid and West Wales have been commissioned by local health boards since September 2004. The transition from GP-led services to a LHB-led service has been very successful. LHBs will continue to monitor the performance of the services for their effectiveness and efficiency.

Lisa Francis: Further to the Minister's written Cabinet statement of 30 October 2006, will the Minister specify the drugs that will receive additional funding? (WAQ48476)

Brian Gibbons: The specific disease modifying therapy drugs supported by the MS risk sharing scheme are:

Copaxone (Glatiramer acetate)

Rebif 22 (interferon beta)

Rebif 44 (interferon beta)

Beta Interferon: and (interferon beta)

Avonex (interferon beta)

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration

Leanne Wood: Will the Minister make a statement on the number of officials in the Communities First unit that have community development qualifications? (WAQ48272)

The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (Edwina Hart): With regard to the first part of your question, there are 25 staff in the Communities First unit.

As to your request for details of any staff who work in the unit who hold any accredited qualifications relating to community development such as NOCS Qualifications in Community Development, I should point out that the Permanent Secretary has delegated authority for recruitment matters rather than Assembly Ministers.

However, I can confirm that the civil service has traditionally expected teams to have generic rather than specialist skills and the Assembly Government's Communities First unit reflects this. However, more recently, the Assembly Government has identified the need to consider the issue of balancing generic and specialist skills and is addressing this through the professional skills for Government programme, among others. This work is still at a relatively early stage but the Communities First unit will be liaising closely with colleagues in the human resources strategy team to consider the future implications for team development.

Also, when recruiting to posts, there is an emphasis on competencies such as 'experience of working with external partners, including community groups'. That is true of both internal and external recruitment. Staff who are in post are developed to ensure deeper understanding and continuity to enable them to continue in an area of work that they are committed to. The Assembly Government has also brought in secondees with appropriate expertise for the benefit of partnerships, staff and the programme as a whole.

In addition, it is not primarily the role of the Communities First unit to provide specialist advice on community development issues to partnerships and staff working on the programme. This role falls more naturally to a range of support agencies, including the Communities First support network, county voluntary councils and the large number of support teams embedded in local authorities and other grant recipient bodies. Many of these support agencies include staff with relevant qualifications and, more commonly, experience of community development.