

Written Questions answered from 10 to 17 January 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

Targets for Replies to Correspondence

Ron Davies: What are the targets currently in force for Ministers to reply to correspondence from i) Assembly Members and ii) others? (WAQ15048)

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): There is a 10-working-day target for officials to draft replies for Ministers' consideration. Ministers issue replies as soon as possible after receipt of these draft replies. For other correspondence, there is a 15-working-day target date for the preparation of draft replies.

Replies to Correspondence

Ron Davies: Will the First Minister produce a table showing, for each Minister, what percentage during 2001 replied to correspondence within the target time and what percentage of correspondence remained unanswered after i) one week ii) two weeks and iii) over two weeks? (WAQ15051)

The First Minister: Since February 2001, when the figures first became available, 4 per cent of correspondence was cleared within one week, 17 per cent was cleared within two weeks and 69 per cent was cleared in over two weeks for all Cabinet Ministers. Eighty-four per cent of all correspondence is answered within 15 days and 91 per cent within 20 working days.

	Total	Within 1 Week	Within 2 Weeks	> 2 Weeks
Andrew Davies	%	13.33	23.33	48.33
Carwyn Jones	%	2.13	8.75	80.84
The Deputy First Minister	%	3.04	13.60	65.65
Edwina Hart	%	9.87	29.61	52.72
The First Minister	%	4.06	14.50	65.08
Jane Davidson	%	2.68	15.81	68.73
Jane Hutt	%	2.08	17.12	73.33
Jenny Randerson	%	5.87	21.76	62.35
Sue Essex	%	3.34	16.09	70.26
TOTAL	%	3.86	17.27	68.65

Online Voting

William Graham: Will the First Minister make a statement about any discussions that he has held with the Secretary of State for Wales concerning online voting? (WAQ15096)

The First Minister: I have had no such discussions. There have been some limited trials of electronic voting recently, but none involving online voting.

Railtrack

David Davies: How much of the Welsh Assembly Government's pension fund has been invested in Railtrack? (WAQ15176)

The First Minister: There is no Welsh Assembly Government pension scheme. The National Assembly for Wales Members' pension fund is a matter for the House Committee and the pension fund trustees.

Clayton Engineering Limited

Michael German: What help and information has been provided to Clayton Engineering in Knighton following the meeting held in late 2000 with Clayton Engineering and myself as the then Minister for Economic Development? (WAQ15237)

The First Minister: Following your meeting with Clayton Engineering Limited, which I understand was in February 2001, the company has received a number of contacts and offers of support from the Welsh Development Agency, WalesTrade International and others.

A detailed breakdown of the nature and extent of support offered, undertaken and planned will be provided separately.

Questions on Economic Development to the First Minister

Manufacturing Industry

William Graham: Will the First Minister make a statement on the future of the manufacturing industry in Wales? (WAQ15022)

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): The manufacturing industry continues to form a very important part of the Welsh economy, while experiencing difficulties at present. I am confident that manufacturing will recover from the present downturn in the sector if export markets become profitable again and provided that the individual companies in the sector continue to develop a dynamic approach to innovation, enterprise, technology and exports. It is a general characteristic of advanced economies for the service sector to provide most of the employment growth.

Fishing Projects

Peter Black: How much Objective 1 money has been committed to fishing projects in Wales? (WAQ15023)

The First Minister: A sum of £15,000 funding from the financial instrument for fisheries guidance part of Objective 1 has been committed to the Pembrokeshire fish week. Other projects are under consideration.

Assistance for People who Lost their Jobs During December

Nick Bourne: What plans does the First Minister have to assist the hundreds of people in south and north Wales who lost their jobs in December? (WAQ15024)

The First Minister: The Welsh Assembly Government and Team Wales partners co-ordinate action in response to major closure announcements. Measures are already in place to assist staff affected by recent closure announcements. When redundancies are deemed significant, the Employment Service, careers companies and Education and Learning Wales offer support to companies and affected employees. ELWa's rapid response measures include training tailored to the needs of the individual and the local labour market, and help such as travel assistance, training materials and childcare to remove barriers.

Procedures were strengthened recently through a memorandum of understanding between the Welsh Development Agency and ELWa, and there is scope to build upon that to include others such as the Employment Service and Careers Wales. That would reflect the successful co-operative approach pioneered in response to the Corus redundancies.

Consignia

Nick Bourne: What discussions has the First Minister had with Consignia regarding possible job losses and reductions in service in Wales? (WAQ15025)

The First Minister: I have not had any discussions with Consignia about potential job losses or reductions in service in Wales. However, my officials are in regular contact with the company. I understand that Consignia is still drawing up detailed restructuring plans and that it is too early to say what the implications of that will be for jobs in Wales.

Welsh Gross Domestic Product

Ron Davies: Will the First Minister provide estimates of the likely movements of Welsh GDP as a percentage of the UK economy in 2001? (WAQ15088)

The First Minister: There are no official estimates available for Welsh GDP in 2001. The latest information available is a provisional estimate for 1999. Official data does not allow year-on-year real growth to be calculated below the UK level and there are no official forecast figures.

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

Use of the Welsh Language in the Private Sector

Glyn Davies: When did the Minister last discuss promoting greater use of the Welsh language in the private sector with the chairman of the Welsh Language Board? (WAQ15091)

The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language (Jenny Randerson): That aspect of the board's work was discussed at my last meeting with the chair and chief executive of the Welsh Language Board, which was held on 18 December 2001.

Welsh Language Teaching and Training

Glyn Davies: Have any proposals been made by the Welsh Language Board for improving the co-ordination of Welsh language teaching and training and the activities of the many organisations and agencies involved? (WAQ15092)

Glyn Davies: Where does responsibility lie for maintaining an overview of Welsh language education and training and the activities of the many organisations and agencies involved? (WAQ15094)

Jenny Randerson: The responsibility for the activities of the Assembly sponsored public bodies in the education and training field rests with the Welsh Assembly Government. The Welsh Language Board's management statement confers on the board a function of maintaining an overview of Welsh-medium education. The recent quinquennial review of the board identified the need to define this role in greater detail. We will pursue that matter with the board when we follow up the recommendations of the quinquennial review report.

Dicussions with the Chairman of the Welsh Language Board

Glyn Davies: When did the Minister last discuss the co-ordination of Welsh language teaching and training and the activities of the many organisations involved, with the chairman of the Welsh Language Board? (WAQ15093)

Jenny Randerson: At my last meeting with the Welsh Language Board on 18 December, a number of matters were discussed, including the teaching of Welsh as a second language.

Text Messaging

Glyn Davies: When did the Minister last discuss the promotion of greater use of the Welsh language in text messaging with the chairman of the Welsh Language Board? (WAQ15095)

Jenny Randerson: The chairman of the Welsh Language Board and I discuss a wide range of issues regularly. I am aware that the use of Welsh in the field of mobile communications could well be developed and the board has been pressing the advantages with network providers. Nothing precludes the use of Welsh for texting purposes, which depends on the chosen language of the person sending the text.

Gwasanaethau Radio a Theledu

Owen John Thomas: Pa gyfarfodydd y mae'r Gweinidog wedi'u cael er mwyn sicrhau derbynriad y gwasanaethau radio a theledu priodol drwy ddulliau daearol ym mhob rhan o Gymru? (WAQ15223) [W]

Jenny Randerson: Nid yw darlledu yn fater sydd wedi'i ddatganoli. Fodd bynnag, yr wyf yn cwrdd â darlledwyr sy'n gweithio yng Nghymru o bryd i'w gilydd, ac yn cadw mewn cysylltiad â'r Comisiwn Teledu Annibynnol. Yr wyf hefyd wedi codi'r mater mewn cyfarfod â Dr Kim Howells.

Radio and Television Services

Owen John Thomas: What meetings has the Minister had to ensure reception of the appropriate radio and television services through terrestrial means in every part of Wales? (WAQ15223) [W]

Jenny Randerson: Broadcasting is not a devolved matter. Nevertheless, I meet the broadcasters based in Wales from time to time, and keep in contact with the Independent Television Commission. I have also raised this issue at a meeting with Dr Kim Howells.

Y Swyddfa Gyfathrebu

Owen John Thomas: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar y sefyllfa ddiweddaraf ynghylch OFCOM? (WAQ15224) [W]

Jenny Randerson: Cafodd Mesur y Swyddfa Gyfathrebu ei ail ddarllenriad yn Nhŷ'r Cyffredin ar 14 Ionawr. Mae'r Mesur bellach yn destun trafod Pwyllgor, a disgwylir i'r cam hwnnw ddod i ben ddechrau mis Chwefror. Bydd y Mesur yn caniatáu sefydlu OFCOM er mwyn iddi allu ymbaratoi at y swyddogaethau rheoliadol y bydd yn gyfrifol amdanynt yn y pen draw.

The Office of Communications

Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the current situation with regards to OFCOM? (WAQ15224) [W]

Jenny Randerson: The second reading of the Office of Communications Bill was held at the House of Commons on 14 January. The Bill will now proceed to Committee stage, which is expected to be completed in early February. This Bill will enable the establishment of OFCOM so that the body can prepare itself for the regulatory functions for which it will eventually be responsible.

Welsh Language Act 1993

Peter Black: What proposals does the Minister have to bring new organisations into the scope of the Welsh Language Act? (WAQ15225) [R]

Jenny Randerson: I intend to bring subordinate legislation forward by the summer, which will name further bodies for the purposes of the Welsh Language Act. We are at an advanced stage of consultation with the bodies concerned.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Students Studying European Languages and Business

Jonathan Morgan: What has been the numerical trend concerning students studying European languages and business at the university institutions in Wales between 1996-97 and 2000-01? (WAQ15026)

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): The following table gives the numbers of further and higher education students on business studies and European languages courses at higher education institutions in Wales. The figures for academic year 2000-01 are not yet available.

	Business studies (a)	European languages (b)
1996-97	14,280	1,050
1997-98	13,090	990
1998-99	13,070	870
1999-2000	13,130	580

(a) Includes business and management studies, operational research, financial management, accountancy, marketing and market research, industrial relations, catering and institutional management, land and property management, transport and other business and administrative studies.

(b) Includes French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Scandinavian, Russian, Slavonic and east European and other European languages.

Language Lecturers

Jonathan Morgan: How many additional university language lecturers were employed to increase the European language skills of Welsh students between 1996-97 and 2000-01? (WAQ15027)

Jane Davidson: Data are only available for academic staff, which include researchers as well as lecturers, in French, German and Spanish at higher education institutions in Wales. Between 1998-99 and 2000-01, an additional 13 academic staff were employed in these subjects. Comparable data are not available prior to 1998-99.

Language Provision at Higher Education Institutions

Jonathan Morgan: What additional resources is the Minister planning to allow Welsh HEIs to increase language provision? (WAQ15028)

Jane Davidson: Higher education institutions in Wales receive funding from the Assembly via the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. The council allocates the bulk of the funding based on institutions' own plans for the numbers of students studying in different subject categories, but taking into account performance in previous years. Higher education institutions are autonomous bodies and, as such, determine, in accordance with their own priorities, the level of support that they wish to provide for languages or any other subject area.

Election Polling Stations

William Graham: Will the Minister indicate the number of schools in Wales used as election polling stations? (WAQ15042) [R]

Jane Davidson: Designation of polling places is a matter for individual returning officers, within electoral law and guidance from the Electoral Commission and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, not the Assembly. The exact number of polling stations in schools will vary from one election to the next.

Vocational Education

William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the matching of vocational education with the needs of Welsh companies? (WAQ15043) [R]

Jane Davidson: Measures are in place to ensure that vocational education meets the needs of employers. The Future Skills Wales project provides a wide range of information on the skills needs of Welsh employers, and that is disseminated widely to learning providers and Careers Wales. That information, in addition to national occupational standards and skills information provided by national training organisations, is used to help design qualifications and the learning frameworks for work-based programmes such as modern apprenticeships and our new modern skills diploma for adults. Following the ‘Qualifying for Success’ consultation, which underlined the need for vocational and academic qualifications to have equal status, we implemented revised advanced general national vocational qualifications, now re-named as advanced vocational certificates of education and commonly known as vocational A-levels. These have structures that make it more practical for students to combine vocational and academic studies. We have also introduced AS-sized ASVCEs and, from September this year, vocational general certificates of secondary education will also be available.

Rees Commission

Peter Black: What funding has the Minister made available to implement the report of the Rees commission on further and higher education? (WAQ15044)

Jane Davidson: The budget settlement for 2002-03 contains a total provision of £21 million for student support. Together with £20 million in the reserve, which the Cabinet has agreed may be used for expenditure relating to the Rees report, this makes £41 million available for the first two terms of the 2002-03 academic year. Depending on how the Rees recommendations are implemented, any additional funding required to deliver support for the third term of the 2002-03 academic year and the first two terms of 2003-04 and thereafter would have to be a top priority in terms of bids for the budget planning round in 2002 and subsequent years.

Tuition Fees

Peter Black: What discussions has the Minister had with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in relation to the future of up-front tuition fees in England and Wales? (WAQ15045)

Jane Davidson: One of the recommendations contained in the report of the independent investigation group into student hardship and funding in Wales (the Rees report) calls on the Assembly to use all means at its disposal to persuade the UK Government that up-front tuition fees should be replaced by an end-loaded arrangement. Following publication of the report in June last year, I discussed its content and recommendations with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Estelle Morris and the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, Margaret Hodge. They have acknowledged the value of that evidence. In a recent letter, Estelle Morris informed me that the review of student support currently being undertaken by her department—a wide-ranging review that will, inter alia, consider the role of tuition fees—will take full account of the arguments put forward by Rees.

Faith Schools

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on the role of faith schools in Wales? (WAQ15046)

Jane Davidson: There are 271 Church in Wales and Roman Catholic primary and secondary schools in the maintained sector in Wales. These schools, which are maintained by local education authorities, make a significant contribution to educational provision in Wales.

The decision to propose the establishment of a new faith school lies with the relevant authorities of the faith in question. Any proposal needs to demonstrate that there is an unmet demand for that type of school provision in the area.

Free Transport to Schools

Owen John Thomas: What discussions has the Minister had with a view to making possible changes to the legal definition of 'walking distance' with respect to the provision of free transport to schools? (WAQ15047)

Jane Davidson: The statutory walking distance relating to home-to-school transport is set out in primary legislation. A recent Audit Commission report entitled 'Going Places' has recommended to central Government that legislation on entitlement to free home-to-school transport be reviewed. My officials will liaise closely with the Department for Education and Skills about how it proposes to respond to that recommendation.

Level Three Special Educational Needs Pupils

Ann Jones: What is the amount spent by each local authority area on level three special educational needs pupils as a) total numbers in each local education authority, b) percentage of pupils in each LEA? (WAQ15112)

Jane Davidson: This information is not held centrally by the National Assembly, and it would not be economically expedient to procure. However, under the Special Educational Need (Provision of Information by Local Authorities) (Wales) Regulations 2002, authorities will be required to publish information relating to policies and provision for children with special educational needs. Under the regulations, general expenditure trends relating to funding allocated by local authorities in the field of SEN provision should become more apparent.

I propose to establish, from April 2002, an all-Wales steering group to assist with the co-ordination of SEN delivery throughout Wales. In considering respective LEA performance and practices for children with SEN, the steering group will be in a position to audit and report on patterns of provision throughout the country.

Educational Psychologists

Ann Jones: How many educational psychologists are employed in each local authority area in Wales in a) total numbers, b) as a percentage per 1,000 pupils within that county area? (WAQ15113)

Jane Davidson: This information is not collected centrally by the National Assembly for Wales and there would be a disproportionate cost to collect it.

I recognise that the number of children with statements has led to growing pressure on educational psychologists, who are spending more of their time carrying out statutory assessments at the expense of early intervention and advisory work.

‘Shaping the Future for Special Education: An Action Programme for Wales’ included a commitment to review the role of the educational psychology service in Wales. The educational psychology working group was established to take this forward.

A report has been commissioned to look specifically at the role of the educational psychology service in rural Wales. The advisory group will discuss the report’s recommendations and how they might be implemented.

Statements for Children with Special Educational Needs

Ann Jones: What is the number of statements for children with special educational needs dealt with over the last five years by county in descending order? (WAQ15114)

Jane Davidson: The number of children with statements of SEN for the last five years by county and in descending order are:

Local education authority	1996-97
Cardiff	1,596
Carmarthenshire	1,345
Wrexham	1,161
Swansea	1,145
Caerphilly	1,069
Newport	974
Flintshire	941
Pembrokeshire	806
Neath Port Talbot	796
Powys	746
The Vale of Glamorgan	654
Gwynedd	653
Blaenau Gwent	627
Rhondda Cynon Taff	623
Monmouthshire	605
Conwy	521
Torfaen	512
Denbighshire	485
Ceredigion	475
Isle of Anglesey	395
Bridgend	300
Merthyr Tydfil	233

Local education authority	1997-98
Cardiff	1,758
Carmarthenshire	1,332
Swansea	1,143
Wrexham	1,102
Caerphilly	1,026
Flintshire	980

Newport	916
Neath Port Talbot	851
Pembrokeshire	795
Conwy	767
Powys	760
Gwynedd	730
Blaenau Gwent	715
Rhondda Cynon Taff	705
Torfaen	616
Monmouthshire	581
The Vale of Glamorgan	530
Ceredigion	515
Denbighshire	460
Isle of Anglesey	409
Bridgend	352
Merthyr Tydfil	250

Local education authority	1998-99
Cardiff	1,707
Carmarthenshire	1,306
Caerphilly	1,180
Swansea	1,086
Flintshire	1,051
Wrexham	1,032
Newport	950
Powys	849
Gwynedd	834
Conwy	787
Neath Port Talbot	787
Rhondda Cynon Taff	754
Pembrokeshire	747
Blaenau Gwent	669
Torfaen	629
Ceredigion	528
Monmouthshire	528
The Vale of Glamorgan	509
Denbighshire	440
Isle of Anglesey	424
Bridgend	337
Merthyr Tydfil	230

Local education authority	1999-2000
Cardiff	1,694

Carmarthenshire	1,230
Flintshire	1,122
Swansea	1,087
Wrexham	1,054
Caerphilly	1,026
Newport	990
Gwynedd	874
Neath Port Talbot	834
Conwy	801
Powys	799
Pembrokeshire	696
Torfaen	637
Blaenau Gwent	628
Rhondda Cynon Taff	591
Denbighshire	554
Ceredigion	517
Isle of Anglesey	490
The Vale of Glamorgan	481
Monmouthshire	472
Bridgend	341
Merthyr Tydfil	236

Local education authority	2000-01
Cardiff	1,776
Carmarthenshire	1,201
Flintshire	1,183
Swansea	1,084
Wrexham	1,063
Caerphilly	1,048
Newport	993
Powys	944
Conwy	887
Neath Port Talbot	880
Gwynedd	842
Pembrokeshire	682
Rhondda Cynon Taff	656
Torfaen	614
Denbighshire	563
Blaenau Gwent	540
Isle of Anglesey	519
Monmouthshire	476
The Vale of Glamorgan	470
Ceredigion	420
Bridgend	337

Number of Children Awaiting Statements for Special Needs Education

Ann Jones: How many children are awaiting statements for special needs education for each of the local authority areas in descending order as a) total numbers, b) percentage of the school population? (WAQ15115)

Jane Davidson: Information on the number of children awaiting statements is not collected by the National Assembly. However, attached below is information on the number of assessments completed and the number of new statements issued.

Assessments, by local education authority

LEA	<i>Number of pupils</i>							
	New statements		Assessments completed, statements not issued		Assessments ongoing at 31 Dec.		Total assessments completed or ongoing	
	1999	2000	1999	2000	1999	2000	1999	2000
Blaenau Gwent	33	23	16	6	32	29	81	58
Bridgend	49	44	4	10	15	16	68	70
Caerphilly	201	113	18	24	108	83	327	220
Cardiff	203	269	4	-	90	68	297	337
Carmarthenshire	110	93	31	23	58	51	199	167
Ceredigion	56	64	9	12	10	23	75	99
Conwy	138	150	14	27	62	38	214	215
Denbighshire	93	66	11	11	45	19	149	96
Flintshire	160	130	15	15	32	36	207	181
Gwynedd	177	145	8	4	69	22	254	171
Isle of Anglesey	131	80	4	18	56	20	191	118
Merthyr Tydfil	30	30	-	1	20	31	50	62
Monmouthshire	59	42	2	4	55	26	116	72
Neath Port Talbot	101	119	8	14	25	32	134	165
Newport	195	138	25	15	37	38	257	191
Pembrokeshire	51	60	19	17	16	57	86	134
Powys	110	146	2	2	19	21	131	169
Rhondda Cynon Taff	64	88	2	20	98	139	164	247
Swansea	118	124	-	-	66	64	184	188
Torfaen	81	81	12	10	17	31	110	122
The Vale of Glamorgan	43	48	3	2	31	32	77	82
Wrexham	147	101	8	9	21	11	176	121
Wales	2,350	2,154	215	244	982	887	3,547	3,285

Educational Social Workers

Ann Jones: How many educational social workers are employed in each local authority area in a) total numbers, b) as a percentage per 1,000 pupils in that county area? (WAQ15118)

Jane Davidson: We do not collect, centrally, numbers of education social workers employed by local authorities.

Questions to the Minister for Environment

Castle Cement

Glyn Davies: When will the decision be made on the planning application made by Castle Cement for a new kiln at its Padeswood works? (WAQ15090)

The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex): It is anticipated that a planning decision committee will be established to consider the application in February, with the decision being issued shortly afterwards.

Questions to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

Anglesey County Council (Observation Team)

Peter Rogers: Was an observation team or individual sent to Anglesey County Council by the Minister at any time during 2001? (WAQ15019)

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): Assembly officials visited Anglesey County Council during 2001, as they visited other councils, in the normal course of their duties.

Allocation of Consequential from the Pre-budget Statement

Ann Jones: Will the £49 million consequential increase in the Welsh block arising out of the pre-budget statement be directed to the national health service? (WAQ15020)

Edwina Hart: I gave a clear statement in Plenary on 8 January that this additional provision will be made available to health and social services in Wales.

Spending Plans for the Increase in the Welsh Block Grant

Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on her plans for spending the extra £49 million for the Welsh block fund announced by Gordon Brown on 27 November? (WAQ15021)

Edwina Hart: I refer to the statement that I made in Plenary on 8 January 2002.

Cymuned (Funding)

Peter Rogers: Has the group known as Cymuned ever been in receipt of any funding from the National Assembly for Wales? (WAQ15041)

Edwina Hart: No.

ASPBs (Management of Public Funds)

Peter Rogers: What policies has the Minister put in place to ensure that Assembly sponsored public bodies effectively manage public funds? (WAQ15049)

Edwina Hart: The ASPB monitoring regime is very robust.

Each executive ASPB has a designated accounting officer who has personal responsibility for the regularity and propriety of the organisation's finances, the keeping of proper accounts, and ensuring good value for money through the prudent, economical and efficient administration of the body. The accounting officer also has responsibility for giving evidence to the National Assembly Audit Committee in respect of matters relating to the organisation's accounts.

The management statement and financial memorandum issued to each ASPB sets out further the Assembly's expectations in relation to the management of public funds. The management statement and financial memorandum also makes clear the duty placed on the chairperson and other board members to

ensure that the ASPB acts in a way that promotes high standards of public finance, including the promotion of regularity and propriety and good value for money.

Underpinning this activity are the strict disciplines of the ASPB corporate planning arrangements, which comprise the production of a three-year corporate plan, an annual operational plan and an annual report, which together provide a sound basis for in-year and annual performance monitoring.

ASPBs are also subject to external audit and specific economy, efficiency and effectiveness examinations conducted by the Auditor General for Wales. Also, every five years the Assembly undertakes a quinquennial review of each ASPB. These reviews comprise a stocktake of the financial and resource management of an ASPB. The review findings are published.

ASPBs (Administrative Performance)

Peter Rogers: Further to her reply to WAQ14748, where objective external comparators have been used, will the Minister make a statement on how ASPB administrative performance has compared to the benchmark? (WAQ15050)

Edwina Hart: As I made clear in my answer to WAQ14748, benchmarking can be valuable in providing information to support management. It should however not be considered in isolation of other management information and, therefore, it would be inappropriate for me, or anyone else, to comment on an ASPB's performance based solely on benchmark data.

I will, nevertheless, continue to encourage ASPBs to use benchmarking to support management where it is appropriate to do so, but I have no plans to establish an external set of benchmarks along the lines that you have suggested previously.

The New Assembly Building

Glyn Davies: Further to WAQ13871 and WAQ14724, is the Minister now in a position to provide the information requested? (WAQ15089)

Edwina Hart: The settlement of the final account with the management contractor is yet to be concluded. Therefore, the expenditure referred to in WAQ13871 and WAQ14724 needs to remain commercial in confidence.

Communities First Scheme (Expenditure on Administration)

Janet Ryder: How much has been spent on administrating the Communities First scheme during its first year? (WAQ15099)

Edwina Hart: I have allocated £659,000, this financial year, to the Communities First support network, which will provide advice and support on the implementation of the programme.

Communities First (Encouraging Bids)

Janet Ryder: Has the Assembly approached any groups to encourage them to submit bids for Communities First funding? (WAQ15100)

Edwina Hart: Eligible groups have been invited to apply for funding under the programme since early July 2001. The Communities First team has also offered them support and advice when developing their bids.

Communities First (Assembly Officials)

Janet Ryder: How many Assembly officials have worked in the division in charge of running the Communities First scheme since its establishment? (WAQ15101)

Janet Ryder: How many Assembly officials work in the division in charge of running the Communities First scheme? (WAQ15102)

Edwina Hart: The Communities Directorate, which is in charge of running the Communities First scheme, covers a wide range of community regeneration and social inclusion programmes. Those Assembly officials who work in the Communities Directorate include staff who specifically work on Communities First.

Communities First (Community Groups)

Janet Ryder: Which community groups have, and will directly benefit from, grants for projects during the first year of the Communities First programme? (WAQ15103)

Edwina Hart: A number of community groups will benefit from Communities First funding in the first year. I intend to report regularly to the Local Government and Housing Committee on allocations made per authority area.

Communities First (Advice on Development)

Janet Ryder: Who is advising the Government of Wales on the development of the Communities First programme? (WAQ15104)

Edwina Hart: I have set up the community regeneration and social inclusion policy board to advise on the strategic direction of Communities First. Furthermore, we are considering the type of advice necessary for the further development of the programme.

Communities First (Public Consultation Meetings)

Janet Ryder: Has the Assembly informed every relevant local authority of each public consultation meeting on Communities First that it has held within their areas? (WAQ15105)

Edwina Hart: Where appropriate, local authorities have been informed about, and involved in, public consultation meetings on Communities First.

Communities First (Consultation Process)

Janet Ryder: How has the Assembly monitored the way local authorities have run their consultation process on Communities First? (WAQ15106)

Janet Ryder: How many local authorities have carried out full public consultation for the Communities First scheme? (WAQ15107)

Edwina Hart: Officials are continually monitoring how local authorities take forward Communities First in their areas and the extent to which people living in the relevant communities are involved in the process in a meaningful way.

Communities First (Capacity Building)

Janet Ryder: Which groups are receiving funding from Communities First that is intended to be spent on capacity building? (WAQ15108)

Janet Ryder: What amount of Communities First funding is being spent on capacity building? (WAQ15109)

Edwina Hart: To date, approximately £365,000 has been allocated for capacity building purposes.

This funding has been allocated to some local authorities, county voluntary councils and community groups.

Communities First (Funding for Rezolve)

Janet Ryder: What amount of Communities First funding has the group Rezolve received? (WAQ15110)

Edwina Hart: Rezolve has not received any Communities First funding.

Local Government Budget Line for Areas of Deprivation

Ann Jones: Will the Minister list those councils that a) operate the system of keeping a budget line for areas of deprivation, b) how much in percentage terms of the budget is held for that purpose? (WAQ15111)

Edwina Hart: This information is not held by the Assembly, and could only be provided by the Assembly at disproportionate cost. I suggest that you approach councils directly to determine whether they operate such a system.

Communities First (Expert Advice on Implementation)

Janet Ryder: Is there expert advice available to assist the Assembly in the implementation of the Communities First scheme? (WAQ15116)

Edwina Hart: Yes.

Investment in Railtrack

David Davies: How many local authorities had money invested in Railtrack? (WAQ15175)

Edwina Hart: This is not a matter on which the National Assembly for Wales holds information.

Flintshire County Council (Ultra Vires Payments)

Janet Ryder: Is the Minister aware of any cases of ultra vires payments by Flintshire County Council during the last financial year and has she been asked to investigate these matters? (WAQ15244)

Edwina Hart: No.

Flintshire County Council (District Auditor's Report)

Janet Ryder: When did the Minister last meet with members or officials from Flintshire County Council to discuss issues relating to the criticisms of the district auditor's report on the financial management of the authority? (WAQ15245)

Edwina Hart: I routinely meet members and officers from councils throughout Wales. These meetings are in confidence.

Flintshire County Council (Recovery of Ultra Vires Payments)

Janet Ryder: Will the Minister confirm that she used her ministerial powers to stop the recovery of ultra vires payments made by Flintshire County Council, and if so, what were her reasons? (WAQ15246)

Edwina Hart: At the request of the council, I used my powers to sanction the writing off of a payment because they had exhausted all reasonable avenues for recovering it.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Patient Archive Communication System

Peter Black: How much money and resources had been committed to developing the patient archive communication system in Swansea NHS Trust at 31 December 2001? (WAQ15029)

Peter Black: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the patient archive communication system in terms of the operations of an NHS trust? (WAQ15030)

Peter Black: When is it anticipated that the patient archive communication system will be fully operational across all functions of the Swansea NHS Trust? (WAQ15031)

Peter Black: What is the current timetable for rolling out the introduction of the patient archive communication system across the Swansea NHS Trust? (WAQ15032)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): Swansea NHS Trust submitted an outline business case for a patient archive communication system to the NHS Directorate last September. We felt that the document required further work, including on issues of revenue affordability, before approval could be considered. Our comments and suggestions were forwarded to the trust in November. The trust needs to consider and agree locally a range of funding streams.

The trust is now addressing our concerns and developing the outline business case for re-submission. Only after the full business case process is concluded will realistic timescales be available.

Specific requests about resources committed to developing the proposals and other details of the proposals should be directed to Swansea NHS Trust.

Drug and Alcohol Addiction

Peter Black: How many people were treated in Wales for drug and alcohol addiction? (WAQ15033)

Jane Hutt: In 2000-01, the number of substance misusers reported as being in treatment with specialist drug services and general practitioners was 9,770. However, this is likely to be an underestimate as not all treatment episodes are reported. My officials are encouraging practitioners to fully participate in reporting to the national drug treatment monitoring system to improve the accuracy of centrally-collected data. It is currently difficult to readily separate figures for alcohol misuse.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine

David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a brief statement on the uptake rate of the MMR vaccine in Wales? (WAQ15034)

Jane Hutt: It is vital that children are offered protection against measles, mumps and rubella. That protection is best offered by the MMR vaccine. The current uptake rate of MMR in Wales, at 84.7 per cent, is of concern and raises the threat of an outbreak of one or more of these diseases.

Unvaccinated children remain at risk of acquiring these diseases through contact, and measles is one of the world's biggest killers. Rubella, though generally a mild disease, is a threat to the unborn child in an unvaccinated mother. Mumps, equally, is generally a mild disease; however, some 65 per cent of hospitalised cases have shown signs of meningitis.

Immunisation with MMR offers effective protection against these diseases but high uptake rates need to be maintained if the benefits are to be optimised. We have launched the mythbusters initiative, and an information programme. This aims to help health professionals set out the facts for parents who need to be fully informed about the health of their children. I will consider further initiatives to ensure that parents are fully informed.

Patients Seeking Private Treatment

Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister confirm whether the number of patients seeking private treatment to avoid NHS waiting lists has increased under the National Assembly Government? (WAQ15035)

Jane Hutt: Whether or not to be treated privately is entirely a personal decision. We do not collect information on the number of patients who decide to seek private treatment.

Local Health Boards (Clinical Requirements)

William Graham: Will the Minister outline how the clinical requirements of the local health boards that serve relatively small populated areas will be safeguarded against the purchasing influence of neighbouring health boards serving a larger population? (WAQ15036)

Jane Hutt: The model to be adopted for commissioning health services in the new arrangements was outlined in my Plenary statement of 15 November 2001. This will be one in which local health boards, local authorities, trusts and the voluntary sector work together to ensure joined-up and, where appropriate, integrated commissioning arrangements for the hospital and community services within local areas. The Assembly will seek to ensure that local organisations will set up processes to work together in this way so that the best possible range and quality of services are secured for their local populations through effective and value for money commissioning. In the first stages, this process will be overseen by three regional Assembly offices to ensure a consistent and paced development of such joint working.

The role currently played by the Specialist Health Service Commission for Wales will also be strengthened. The commission will continue to provide an all-Wales, arm's length commissioning body, dealing with tertiary and other highly specialised acute services. Post-reorganisation, a board will be constituted, which will be made up of regional representatives of local health boards, trusts and the National Assembly.

Local Health Boards as Purchasing Organisations

William Graham: Will the Minister confirm that local health boards serving a population of less than 100,000 can be a viable purchasing organisation? (WAQ15037)

Jane Hutt: The arrangements set out in WAQ15036 are designed to ensure that commissioning of health services takes place at an appropriate level and in a way that secures high quality services and value for money.

Financial Difficulties for Pharmacies

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on the financial difficulties faced by some pharmacies in Wales? (WAQ15038)

Jane Hutt: Community pharmacists providing pharmaceutical services to the NHS are independent contractors and we should have no information on their individual financial status.

Health authorities have discretion that would allow them to help contractors who are having temporary cash-flow problems, for example, over reimbursement of high-cost drugs supplied to the NHS.

I am aware that a few contractors are having particular problems relating to closure of accounts because of pricing delays at Health Solutions Wales. I expect Health Solutions Wales to address these issues as well as making every effort to solve their backlog problems

NHS Direct Wales Helpline (Nurses Available)

David Davies: How many nurses are available per shift to respond to calls made to NHS Direct Wales helpline? (WAQ15039)

Jane Hutt: The nursing staff on duty is determined by predicted peaks and flows of call volumes based on known patterns of demand. The numbers of nurses on duty at any one time consequently varies from three nurses during our quietest period (overnight) to 16 nurses during peak demand. These peaks occur on weekends and evenings, particularly on Sunday mornings or on bank holidays, during which time call volumes in excess of 1,000 per day are being dealt with.

NHS Direct Wales Helpline (Waiting Times)

David Davies: What is the average waiting time for callers ringing the NHS Direct Wales helpline? (WAQ15040)

Jane Hutt: The average waiting time (by which I assume the questioner refers to the time between ringing the number and having the phone answered) is 40 seconds after the completion of the greetings message. The bilingual greeting message itself takes approximately 20 seconds.

Assembly Directions Issued

David Melding: How many Assembly directions did the Minister issue in 2001 as instruments in writing? (WAQ15052)

Jane Hutt: Assembly directions issued as instruments in writing can be legislative or non-legislative in character. During 2001, I issued a total of seven legislative Assembly directions as instruments in writing which, in accordance with Standing Order No. 27, were subject to the appropriate procedures for consideration and scrutiny. A number of non-legislative Assembly directions were also made within the area of health and social services which, due to their routine nature, were issued under established processes.

Use of Instruments in Writing to Issue Assembly Directions

David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on her use of instruments in writing to issue Assembly directions? (WAQ15053)

Jane Hutt: The use of instruments in writing to issue directions derives from express powers granted in primary legislation. They can be legislative or non-legislative in character. If legislative, Standing Order No. 27 lays down appropriate procedures for consideration and scrutiny of such directions. On occasions when instruments in writing have been used to make directions of a legislative nature, Standing Order No. 27 has been applied and will continue to be applied in such circumstances.

Availability of Remicade and Enbrel

Rod Richards: Will the Minister make a statement on the availability to the NHS of the arthritis drug, remicade? (WAQ15054)

Rod Richards: Will the Minister make a statement on the availability to the NHS of the arthritis drug, enbrel? (WAQ15055)

Jane Hutt: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is planning to publish clinical guidelines later this year. Health authorities and hospital trusts should take account of these guidelines in setting their policies and priorities. In the meantime, the availability of this drug is a matter for local decision. I would expect each case to be decided on its merits, taking account of available evidence.

Financing the Provision of Enbrel and Remicade

Rod Richards: Is the Minister planning to provide additional funding to health authorities to finance the provision of the arthritis drugs, enbrel and remicade on the NHS? (WAQ15056)

Jane Hutt: I would expect new hospital drugs to be prioritised and funded from the increases in health authority allocations that I announced on 9 January.

Inequalities in Health Fund

Rod Richards: Will the Minister list the successful bids to the inequalities in health fund that were independent of local authorities? (WAQ 15057)

Jane Hutt: Local authorities are one of the main partners in the majority of the 54 projects currently supported by the inequalities in health fund. Thirty-two projects have the local authority as either the lead organisation or main partner. Listed below are the projects that do not involve local authorities directly. However, all those listed have, as the project leader or main partner, a local health group on which local authorities are represented.

Reference	Lead Partner	Project Title
IIH/2001/005	Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust	Cardiac rehabilitation for identified clients diagnosed with angina
IIH/2001/006	Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust	A multi-disciplinary rehabilitation programme for people suffering with congestive heart failure
IIH/2001/020	Carmarthenshire NHS Trust	Calon lân Gwynedd
IIH/2001/022	Carmarthenshire NHS Trust	Rapid access chest pain clinic
IIH/2001/026	Carmarthenshire Local Health Group	Adding years to life for patients with coronary heart disease in Carmarthenshire
IIH/2001/029	Llangollen Health Centre	Targeting heart disease on a deprived housing estate in north Wales
IIH/2001/040	Swansea Local Health Group	Coronary heart disease prevention in primary care
IIH/2001/041	Swansea Local Health Group	Dietetics in primary care
IIH/2001/042	Swansea Local Health Group	Coronary artery disease—reducing the inequalities in care
IIH/2001/043	Pontypridd and Rhondda NHS Trust	Nursing service for heart failure patients

Reference	Lead Partner	Project Title
IIH/2001/054	Ceredigion Local Health Group	Ceredigion community thrombolysis
IIH/2001/064	Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust	Cardiac rehabilitation and secondary prevention for identified clients with angina
IIH/2001/069	Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust	Integrated cardiac rehabilitation team
IIH/2001/072	Gwent Health Authority	Smoking cessation
IIH/2001/089	Merthyr Tydfil Local Health Group	Ischaemic heart disease risk factor intervention project
IIH/2001/090	Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust	Tackling obesity in Blaenau Gwent
IIH/2001/094	Blaenau Gwent Local Health Group	Risk assessment for coronary heart disease in primary care
IIH/2001/098	Neath Port Talbot Local Health Group	Alive and Ticking—raising awareness of heart disease in the community
IIH/2001/100	North Glamorgan NHS Trust	Provision of community-based multi-disciplinary cardiac rehabilitation in the county borough of Merthyr
IIH/2001/107	North Glamorgan NHS Trust	Provision of community-based multi-disciplinary cardiac rehabilitation in the Cynon Valley
IIH/2001/108	Merthyr Tydfil Local Health Group	Diabetes care pathway project
IIH/2001/111	Merthyr Tydfil Local Health Group	Diabetes peer support system

Reimbursing Pharmacies for Materials and Labour

Rod Richards: What is the policy on reimbursing pharmacies for materials and labour? (WAQ15058)

Jane Hutt: Pharmacies contracted to provide pharmaceutical services under the national health service shall be paid in accordance with their terms of service, as set out in the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992 and the drug tariff.

Waiting Times for Pharmacies to be Reimbursed

Rod Richards: What are the current waiting times for pharmacies to be reimbursed for materials and labour used in the dispensing of prescriptions? (WAQ15080)

Jane Hutt: Community pharmacies continue to be paid on the due dates but, because of operational problems at Health Solutions Wales, these payments are based on estimates of the reimbursement due for drugs dispensed. The estimates are calculated using a formula that has been agreed with contractors' representatives. Payments are adjusted once the annual amount due is known. Health Solutions Wales is currently pricing prescriptions dispensed in August 2001 whereas, under normal working arrangements, it would now be pricing December 2001.

Dispensing Fee Paid to Community Pharmacists

Rod Richards: Does the Minister intend to follow the Department of Health's policy of reducing the dispensing fee paid to community pharmacists? (WAQ15081)

Jane Hutt: At present, community pharmacists work to a standard contract for England and Wales. This includes dispensing fees. I am prepared to consider negotiating a separate contract for Wales if asked to do so by contractors' representatives or otherwise if it appears to be in the best interests of Welsh patients.

Closure of Community Pharmacists

Rod Richards: What is the Minister's estimate of the number of pharmacies that will close if she cuts the fee paid to community pharmacists for dispensing prescriptions? (WAQ15082)

Jane Hutt: I am advised that it would be inappropriate to comment on the details of the proposed 2001-02 pay settlement while there is a prospect of judicial review.

Health Solutions Wales Data

Rod Richards: Could the current Health Solutions Wales data be available for analysis to identify areas of savings for the NHS in Wales? (WAQ15083)

Jane Hutt: Yes. Our priority is to get pricing operations up to speed but prescribing data will be published on the internet as soon as operational pressures at Health Solutions Wales permit.

Reimbursement Price for Generic Fluoxetine

Rod Richards: What is the current NHS reimbursement price for generic fluoxetine capsules, 20 milligrams, packs of 30 capsules? (WAQ15084)

Jane Hutt: The price in the January 2002 drug tariff for 20 mg fluoxetine hydrochloride capsules is £8.14 for a manufacturer's calendar pack of 30.

Hospital Bed Occupancy

Ron Davies: What information has the Minister concerning hospital bed occupancy by patients categorised as 'delayed transfers' of care for each health authority area in Wales as of i) 1 May 2000, ii) 1 May 2001, iii) 31 December 2001? (WAQ15085)

Jane Hutt: Collection of data relating to delayed transfers of care commenced in January 2001 and is collected by means of a monthly census. This period, to date, has been used by the service to refine collection processes and validate working methodologies, and these can still be improved. While data relating to each health authority area in Wales is available, this has not so far been published. December data is, as yet, incomplete.

Month	Bro Taf	Dyfed Powys	Gwent	Iechyd Morgannwg	North Wales
Jan 01	166	86	265	116	156
May 01	174	96	186	136	156
Nov 01	243*	118	175	122	140

*Previously under-recorded

Pay and Conditions of Nurses in Powys

Delyth Evans: What discussions has the Minister had with Powys NHS Trust in regard to the pay and conditions of nurses? (WAQ15086)

Delyth Evans: What action is the Minister taking to address differing pay levels for nurses in Powys? (WAQ15087)

Jane Hutt: My officials recently met representatives from Powys NHS Trust to discuss the problem of those staff who are being paid differently because they are employed on different terms and conditions of service. It was also aired at the last meeting of the NHS Wales partnership forum, which I chaired in December. The need to address equal pay has been accepted in the 'Agenda for Change' proposals for a

new NHS pay system, and I have asked my officials to look at ways in which the problem in Powys could be resolved sooner rather than later.

Sellafield (Terrorist Attack)

Alun Pugh: What assessment has been made by the Government of Wales of the effects of a terrorist attack on Sellafield on public health in Wales? (WAQ15097)

Alun Pugh: What consultation has taken place with the Government of Wales about the health impact of a terrorist attack on Sellafield? (WAQ15098)

Jane Hutt: Terrorist threats are a matter for the UK Government. The Welsh Assembly Government is, however, represented in a review of the UK response to threats, which has been set up following the attacks on 11 September. Health services in Wales have emergency plans to deal with the public health consequences of emergencies, including radiation incidents. Since 11 September we have also been actively engaged with other Government health departments to review the resilience of health plans. This review is not specific to Sellafield but aimed at improving health resilience to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats.

Education Social Workers

Ann Jones: How many education social workers are employed in each local authority area in a) total numbers, b) as a percentage per 1,000 pupils in that county area? (WAQ15117)

Jane Hutt: We do not collect, centrally, numbers of education social workers employed by local authorities.

Cost of Generic Fluoxetine to the National Health Service in Wales

Rod Richards: What is the cost to the NHS of generic fluoxetine (prozac) capsules, 20 mg, packs of 30 capsules, in Wales compared to England? (WAQ15119)

Jane Hutt: The drug tariff price of £8.14 to which I referred in WAQ15084 is the same in England and Wales. The actual cost to the NHS would vary from one contractor to another because of the application of the deduction scale in part V of the drug tariff, but again these provisions are common to England and Wales.

Savings on Generic Fluoxetine

Rod Richards: What would be the savings to the NHS in Wales if the price of generic fluoxetine (Prozac) capsules, 20 mg, packs of 30 capsules, were the same in Wales as in England? (WAQ15120)

Jane Hutt: The price as set out in the drug tariff is the same, so there would be no savings.

Advances in Medical Technology

Ann Jones: What procedures are in place to ensure that the Assembly keeps abreast of advances in medical technology? (WAQ15238)

Jane Hutt: In general terms, in order to ensure that I and my officials are kept abreast of advances in medical technology, we liaise closely with a number of agencies, including Welsh Health Supplies, Welsh Health Estates and Health Solutions Wales. We also have formal links with the Department of Health, the Medical Devices Agency and other professional advisory machinery and with constant constituent statutory committees.

Expenditure on Medical Devices

Ann Jones: What percentage of the health budget is spent on medical devices? (WAQ15239)

Jane Hutt: The term ‘medical devices’ covers a wide range of items, from the syringe and scalpel, to the CAT scanner and MRI scanner. The NHS Directorate does not centrally record the proportion of the total NHS budget spent on the full range of such devices. Normally, NHS organisations cover the cost of such items from their discretionary allocations. However, I can confirm that, this year, the National Assembly for Wales has funded certain major specific developments either through the capital renewals programme, or through other more focused initiatives, such as the audiology services project or the major equipment replacement programme. I would be happy to provide details of any of these if they are of interest to the Member.

Internal Cardiovascular Defibrillators

Ann Jones: What representations has the Minister received from health trusts in Wales regarding the use of internal cardiovascular defibrillators? (WAQ15240)

Jane Hutt: I am not aware of any representations having been received from health trusts in Wales. The authorising of internal cardiovascular defibrillators would be undertaken by the Special Health Service Commission for Wales and any representations concerning these devices would be made to it.