

Written Questions answered from 1 to 8 March 2001

[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

Liberal Democrat Special Advisers

Alun Cairns: Was the First Minister consulted in the plans to advertise for Liberal Democrat special advisers? (WAQ10094)

The First Minister: I refer you to the answer I gave on 9 February 2001 (WAQ9740).

Recruiting Liberal Democrat Special Advisers

Alun Cairns: Further to (WAQ9740), what timescale was agreed for the recruitment of Liberal Democrat special advisers, when agreed between the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister last year? (WAQ10095)

The First Minister: The timescale for the recent recruitment of special advisers was based on the timescale for running any external recruitment and was set out in advice to the Deputy First Minister dated 16 January 2001.

Questions to the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economic Development

Private Sector Involvement in Objective 1

Alun Cairns: What initiatives are underway in Wales to encourage private sector involvement in Objective 1? (WAQ9914)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economic Development (Michael German): The private sector unit in the Wales European Funding Office aims to ensure that the private sector can play a full part in the Objective 1 programme. The objectives of the unit are:

- a) to provide a first-stop shop for the private sector;
- b) to translate the single programming document, programme complement and regulations into clear guidance for the private sector, both potential applicants and potential beneficiaries;
- c) to provide guidance and regular briefing for organisations working with the private sector (National Assembly, Business Connect, private sector intermediaries etc);
- d) to work with private sector project sponsors and lead bodies in the development of schemes, particularly providing advice and guidance on eligibility, process and submitting an application;
- e) to develop ideas for schemes which will deliver significant economic growth and to 'sell' these to potential sponsors;
- f) to seek to ensure that the process is made as accessible to the private sector as possible.

The unit is looking to second staff from private sector organisations to assist with this work.

Further details can be found on the private sector section of the WEFO website.

In addition, discussions are underway to determine what support is required by the social partners to enable them to play a full part in the Objective 1 (and other European) process and programme. Proposals include the establishment of an independent social partners support unit in partnership with the Trades Union Congress and Business Wales.

The Impact of UK Tax Policies on Welsh Business

David Davies: What discussions has the Minister had with his colleagues in the UK Government regarding the impact of UK tax policies on Welsh business? (WAQ10080)

Michael German: The First Minister has led discussions covering various aspects of economic policy with Ministers in UK Government including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, having first held discussions with myself and the Finance Minister. These discussions have included taxation policy.

The Dissolution of North and Mid Wales Tourism

Nick Bourne: What is the Minister doing to ensure that jobs will not be lost in north and mid Wales due to the dissolution of north and mid Wales tourism in September 2001? (WAQ10090)

Michael German: The Wales Tourist Board is working closely with the existing three regional tourism companies to minimise possible job losses. It will be for the members of north and mid Wales tourism to decide their own future, possibly as member organisations within the new partnerships. No Wales Tourist Board staff will lose their jobs.

This restructuring will help develop more effective regional partnerships between the private and public sectors and give regional tourism partnerships direct responsibility for their regional tourism strategies and enable them to respond to their own local needs and priorities. The Wales Tourist Board will be providing £2 million in 2001-02 to the four regional tourism partnerships to help them develop and promote tourism in their areas—more than double that given in previous years.

The Structure of the Wales Tourist Board

Nick Bourne: How will the proposed dissolution of north and mid Wales tourism affect the structure of the Wales Tourist Board? (WAQ10092)

Michael German: North and mid Wales tourism companies are quite separate from the Wales Tourist Board and it would be for the membership of both companies to decide on their future operation.

The establishment of the four new regional tourism partnerships will initially require the Wales Tourist Board to fund and appoint four regional development directors. Each will report to a board of management. The board will provide the four regional tourism partnerships with funding of around £2 million for developing and promoting tourism in their areas. The existing tourism company will be able to tender to provide services to the new partnerships.

Wales Tourist Board staff currently working for the regional tourism companies will continue to work for the Wales Tourist Board.

Inward Investment

Alun Cairns: Would the Minister please define the areas specifically targeted by the former Secretary of State for Wales, for 50 per cent of the inward investment stated as being outside the A55 and M4 corridors? (WAQ10116)

Michael German: The Assembly, and formerly the Welsh Office, agrees annual strategic targets with the Welsh Development Agency. In the years prior to 1995-96 these targets were on an all-Wales basis. However, in 1995-96 the then Secretary of State for Wales, John Redwood, asked the agency to create or safeguard 13,000 jobs, of which 20 per cent were outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors.

In the following years, the percentage outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors was raised so that for the year 1998-99 (the year in which the agency merged with the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales), strategic targets specified that no less than 50 per cent of jobs created/safeguarded were outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors. The objective of this was to disperse potential investment opportunities across Wales.

The eastern M4 corridor was defined as the coastal strip running from Chepstow in the east to Pyle in the west; the northern boundary was coincident with the southern boundary of the then programme for the Valleys area, extended east to include the southern half of Monmouthshire. In north Wales, the eastern A55 corridor was defined as the non-rural part of the Wrexham County Borough Council area, the whole of Flintshire and the northern part of Denbighshire, including the towns of St Asaph, Rhyl and Prestatyn.

From 1999-2000, the agency's targets have been split into the nomenclature of units for territorial statistics II areas (the Objective 1 and the non-Objective 1 areas). For 2000-01, the agency has been asked to create and/or safeguard 12,500 jobs in west Wales and the Valleys (the Objective 1 area) and 6,500 jobs in the non-Objective 1 areas in eastern Wales.

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

Diwygio Deddf yr Iaith Gymraeg 1993

Dafydd Wigley: Pa drafodaethau a fu rhwng y Gweinidog dros Ddiwylliant, Chwaraeon a'r Gymraeg a Paul Murphy ynglŷn â diwygio Deddf yr Iaith Gymraeg 1993, ac a wnaiff ddatganiad ar y mater? (WAQ10050) [W]

Y Gweinidog dros Ddiwylliant, Chwaraeon a'r Gymraeg (Jenny Randerson): Nid wyf wedi cael unrhyw drafodaethau gydag Ysgrifennydd Gwladol Cymru am y pwnc hwn. Ar hyn o bryd, nid wyf yn rhagweld yr angen i godi'r mater hwn gydag ef. Mae'r Pwyllgor Diwylliant ar fin dechrau adolygiad o'r polisi iaith Gymraeg. Nid yw'n rhan o'r cylch gwaith a roddodd y Cynulliad i'r Pwyllgor i fynd i'r afael yn benodol â'r angen am newidiadau deddfwriaethol.

Amending the Welsh Language Act 1993

Dafydd Wigley: What discussions has the Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding amending the Welsh Language Act 1993, and will she make a statement on the matter? (WAQ10050) [W]

The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language (Jenny Randerson): I have had no discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales about this subject. I do not presently foresee the need to raise this matter with him. The Culture Committee is about to start a review of Welsh language policy. The Committee has not been remitted by the Assembly to specifically address the need for changes in legislation.

Financial Support for the Wales Millennium Centre

Alun Cairns: When did Assembly sponsored public bodies first receive a request for financial support for the Wales Millennium Centre? (WAQ10087)

Jenny Randerson: The Welsh Development Agency was approached to provide financial support in September 1997 while the Wales Tourist Board was approached in September 1998. Research to identify the date of the approach to Cardiff Bay Development Corporation is ongoing. When that is complete, I shall write to the Member and place a copy in the Library.

Supporting the Wales Millennium Centre with Public Funds

Alun Cairns: When did the Welsh Office/Assembly commit to supporting the Wales Millennium Centre with public funds? (WAQ10088)

Jenny Randerson: The Secretary of State gave a commitment in principle to providing £15.9 million of public sector support in January 1999. This was confirmed in June 1999 following the receipt of advice and due diligence commissioned from consultants BDO Stoy Hayward.

Financial Support for the Wales Millennium Centre

Alun Cairns: When did the Welsh Office receive a request for financial support for the Wales Millennium Centre? (WAQ10089)

Jenny Randerson: During the autumn of 1998 it became clear that there was a potential shortfall in funding against the proposed project cost of the Wales Millennium Centre. Sir Alan Cox wrote to the Secretary of State for Wales on 18 November seeking to establish the total public sector contribution to the scheme, implicitly including some funding required from the Welsh Office. Consideration was then given to the case for the Welsh Office providing a direct contribution. The Secretary of State confirmed in principle the total public sector support of £15.9 million in January 1999, which included a direct contribution by the Welsh Office of £8 million.

Coverage of League of Wales Football Matches

Nick Bourne: What discussions has the Minister had with the media in Wales regarding coverage of League of Wales football matches? (WAQ10096)

Jenny Randerson: To date, I have had no specific discussions on the coverage of League of Wales football matches, with the media in Wales.

However, I am presently consulting key organisations on the value of establishing a group to take a broad look at the issues affecting football in Wales. One of the issues, which could be explored by this group, is the relationship between Welsh football and the media.

Discussions with the Football Association of Wales

Nick Bourne: What discussions has the Minister had with the Football Association of Wales regarding the financial assistance provided to Welsh clubs? (WAQ10097)

Jenny Randerson: I met with the Secretary General of the Football Association of Wales on 26 February 2001, and discussed a number of issues affecting football, including the association's funding and support of League of Wales clubs.

It is for the FA to determine its priorities, though I understand that that funding and support is provided to underpin the structure and administration of the League of Wales.

The Cost of Meeting the Requirements of the Welsh Language Act 1993

Alun Cairns: What estimate has the Minister made of the total cost incurred by public sector organisations in Wales to meet the requirements of the Welsh Language Act 1993? (WAQ10214)

Jenny Randerson: No estimates of such costs have been made. The 1993 Act was passed by Parliament on the basis that, where public bodies incurred extra costs as a result of the need to develop and

administer a Welsh language scheme, these would be met from within the body's mainstream budgets. This was stated in the financial memorandum submitted to Parliament with the Bill.

Broadcasting Welsh-medium Output

Alun Cairns: What support, financial and otherwise, is available for private and independent broadcasters to broadcast Welsh-medium output? (WAQ10222)

Jenny Randerson: Broadcasting is not a devolved matter. Welsh medium public service broadcasting by S4C is funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. BBC Cymru is funded through the licence fee. There is no general funding scheme in operation for independent broadcasters.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Trafodaethau â'r Cyngor Canolog dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant mewn Gwaith Cymdeithasol

Dafydd Wigley: A wnaiff y Gweinidog dros Addysg a Dysgu Gydol Oes ddatganiad ar y trafodaethau a fu rhwng ei hadran hi a'r Cyngor Canolog dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant mewn Gwaith Cymdeithasol o safbwynt yr anawsterau sy'n wynebu myfyrwyr sy'n dilyn cwrs diploma mewn gwaith cymdeithasol i gael cefnogaeth gyllidol ddigonol? (WAQ10049) [W]

Jane Davidson: Mae'r Cyngor Canolog dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant mewn Gwaith Cymdeithasol yn gorff llywodraethol anadrannol ar hyn o bryd sy'n atebol ar y cyd i Weinidogion yng Nghymru, Lloegr, yr Alban a Gogledd Iwerddon. Yng Nghymru, fy nghydweithwraig, Jane Hutt, y Gweinidog dros Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol sydd â chyfrifoldeb am hyn ac mae'r swyddog cyswllt yn gweithio o fewn Arolygiaeth Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru. Ar 1 Hydref 2001, ymgorfforir swyddogaethau'r cyngor yng Nghyngor Gofal Cymru a sefydlwyd o dan Ddeddf Safonau Gofal 2000. Bydd Cyngor Gofal Cymru yn gorff cyhoeddus a noddir gan y Cynulliad.

Felly, nid yw fy adran yn trafod yn uniongyrchol â CCETSW, ond nodais yn fy ngohebiaeth flaenorol ar y pwnc hwn bod fy swyddogion wedi ymgynghori â'u cydweithwyr yn Arolygiaeth Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru o ran cael arian ar gyfer hyfforddiant mewn gwaith cymdeithasol ac roeddent wedi cadarnhau bod ystyriaeth yn cael ei rhoi i'r materion hyn.

Ers yr adeg honno, mae Ms Hutt wedi cyhoeddi bod grŵp gorffen a gorchwyl i gael ei sefydlu ar faterion sy'n ymwneud â'r gweithlu ym maes gofal cymdeithasol. Bwriad y grŵp yw mynd i'r afael â'r lefel gynyddol o bryder a fynegir am faterion recriwtio a chadw staff yn y gweithlu gofal cymdeithasol a'r gostyngiad yn nifer y ceisiadau am hyfforddiant mewn gofal cymdeithasol o ystyried bod y sector yn ehangu'n barhaus.

Bydd y grŵp gorffen a gorchwyl yn cael ei gadeirio gan Brif Arolygydd Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol a bydd yn cynrychioli'r ystod o fuddiannau sydd yn y sector. Bydd yn rhoi adroddiad i'r Gweinidog adeg y Pasg am ei argymhellion. Rhan bwysig o waith y grŵp fydd ystyried diwygio hyfforddiant mewn gofal cymdeithasol gan gynnwys trefniadau at y dyfodol am arian er mwyn mynd i'r afael â'r anawsterau ariannu presennol.

Discussions with the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work

Dafydd Wigley: Will the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning make a statement on the discussions between her department and the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work in relation to the difficulties facing students studying for a diploma in social work in obtaining sufficient financial support? (WAQ10049) [W]

Jane Davidson: The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work is currently an UK non-departmental Government body accountable jointly to Ministers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Wales, this responsibility rests with my colleague, Jane Hutt, Minister for Health and Social Services and the liaison officer's role is located within Social Services Inspectorate Wales. On 1 October 2001, the council's functions will be incorporated into the new Care Council for Wales set up under the Care Standards Act 2000. The care council will be an Assembly sponsored public body.

My department is not therefore in direct discussion with CCETSW. However, in my reply to your previous correspondence on this subject I indicated that my officials had consulted colleagues in Social Services Inspectorate Wales with regard to funding for social work training and they had confirmed that these matters were under consideration.

Since that time, Ms Hutt has announced the setting up of a specialist task and finish group on workforce issues in social care. This group is to address the increasing level of concern being expressed about recruitment and retention issues in the social care workforce, falling numbers of applications for social work training against a background of the continued expansion of the sector.

The task and finish group will be chaired by the Chief Inspector of Social Services and will represent the range of interests in the sector. It will report to the Minister at Easter with its recommendations. An important part of the group's work will be to consider the reform of social work training including future arrangements for funding in order that the current funding difficulties can be addressed.

The New Basic Skill Examinations

Nick Bourne: Will Welsh medium exam papers be available for the new basic skill examinations and, if not, what is the reason for this? (WAQ10105)

Jane Davidson: Welsh medium exam papers will be available for the new basic skills qualifications. Now that the National Assembly has approved the basic skills strategy, developmental work will commence with the intention of introducing the exam papers in both languages at the earliest opportunity.

Co-ordination of the Compact Plus Programme

Kirsty Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on the steps being taken to ensure co-ordination across local authorities boundaries of the compact plus programme in north Wales following the abolition of the training and enterprise councils? (WAQ10221)

Jane Davidson: Compact plus is funded through the youth access initiative. The Assembly has consulted the Welsh Local Government Association and others on the administrative arrangements for the delivery of the initiative from 1 April. The decision has been made that the youth access initiative will transfer to local authorities and be combined with the children and youth partnership fund. Local authorities are best placed to identify, plan and manage a co-ordinated response to youth support needs for their areas. Local authorities can, of course, collaborate on the delivery of programmes if they wish, but I understand that the authorities in north Wales have taken the view that compact plus can continue to operate effectively through individual local authorities without the need for formal co-ordination arrangements.

Discussing School Closures

Nick Bourne: If a school in Wales is to be closed, is it compulsory for a public meeting to be held to discuss the closure before the case is referred to the Assembly? (WAQ10239)

Jane Davidson: Before proposing the closure of any school, local education authorities must consult widely with all interested parties, allowing sufficient time and providing sufficient information for those being consulted to form a considered view. The Assembly has issued detailed guidance on who must be consulted. Although it is not compulsory for the consultation to include a public meeting, in practice most

authorities do hold a meeting or meetings. If, having undertaken the consultation, the LEA decides to go ahead with a closure, it must publish a statutory notice setting out the details of its proposal and invite objections. Where a statutory notice for a school closure attracts objections it comes to me for determination. One of the issues I consider in reaching my decision is the adequacy of the public consultation.

Universal Access to the Internet

David Davies: What assessment has been made of obtaining universal access to the internet by 2005? (WAQ10266) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Assembly Business.*

The Minister for Assembly Business (Andrew Davies): The Assembly is currently consulting on the implementation of an ICT strategy for Wales (<http://www.wales.gov.uk/cymruarlein>), and this includes issues relating to access to the internet. The Assembly is also implementing a package of measures to improve access to the internet through community based facilities. The rollout of ICT learning centres and the people's network in public libraries will allow access to the internet to those unable to afford access at home, and will provide support and training to people who are new to the technology.

In the latest survey carried out by the Office of National Statistics, an average of 7.8 million households in the UK could access the internet from home. That amounts to nearly one third (32 per cent) of all UK households. Levels of access vary greatly between different parts of the UK. In Wales, the proportion of households with access to the internet was around 20 per cent. This figure is higher than that of Northern Ireland (16 per cent) and Scotland (19 per cent).

Ysgol Eifion Wyn, Porthmadog

Gareth Jones: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar y sefyllfa diweddaraf mewn perthynas ag Ysgol Eifion Wyn, Porthmadog, lle mae buddsoddwyr wedi datgan diddordeb mewn prynu'r tir ac adeiladu ysgol newydd? (WAQ10267) [W]

Jane Davidson: Mae hyn yn ymwneud â darparu adeiladau newydd ar gyfer ysgol bresennol. Mater i Gyngor Sir Gwynedd yw hyn, ond mae'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol yn croesawu'r egwyddor o archwilio partneriaethau cyhoeddus / preifat ble y mae hyn yn briodol ac o fudd.

Ysgol Eifion Wyn, Porthmadog

Gareth Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the recent developments at Ysgol Eifion Wyn, Porthmadog, where investors have declared an interest in purchasing the land and building a new school? (WAQ10267) [W]

Jane Davidson: This involves the provision of new premises for an existing school. This is a matter for Gwynedd County Council but the National Assembly welcomes the exploration of public/private partnerships where this is appropriate and beneficial.

Ymdopi â'r Cynnydd mewn Awtistiaeth

Gareth Jones: Pa drafodaethau a wneir i ymdopi a'r cynnydd mewn awtistiaeth yng Nghymru? (WAQ10268) [W]

Jane Davidson: Mater i awdurdodau iechyd a lleol yw darparu ar gyfer anghenion pobl sy'n byw o fewn eu hardaloedd ac sydd wedi cael diagnosis o awtistiaeth. Gan y gall awtistiaeth amrywio'n fawr o ran natur a difrifoldeb, gall y gwasanaethau amrywio hefyd. Gallant gynnwys unrhyw gyfuniad o wasanaethau pediatrig arbenigol, gwasanaethau iechyd meddwl i blant, pobl ifanc ac oedolion, a gwasanaethau anabledau dysgu, yn ogystal â chymorth gan y tîm gofal sylfaenol a chyfraniad gan

wahanol broffesiynau gan gynnwys addysg yn ogystal â iechyd a gofal cymdeithasol. Materion i'w penderfynu'n lleol, gan y rhai sy'n ymwneud â gofal yr unigolyn, yw'r rhain.

Yn ddiweddar, gofynnodd yr Adran Iechyd i'r Cyngor Ymchwil Meddygol gynnal arolwg manwl o'r wybodaeth sydd gennym ar hyn o bryd am awtistiaeth, ac awgrymu meysydd ble y gellid cynnal ymchwil bellach yn y dyfodol. Y nod yw sefydlu darlun clir a chynhwysfawr o'r hyn a wyddom ynghylch pa mor gyffredin yw awtistiaeth, yr hyn sy'n ei achosi, a nifer yr achosion yn ogystal â pha mor gryf yw'r dystiolaeth sy'n sail i'r wybodaeth honno. Rydym yn cefnogi'r fenter hon a byddwn yn cadw golwg clòs ar y gwaith wrth iddo symud yn ei flaen.

Mae'r Cynulliad ei hun wedi ariannu tri darn o waith ymchwil ym maes awtistiaeth, yn ymwneud â gwahanol agweddau ar asesu a gwella sgiliau cyfathrebu plant ag awtistiaeth.

Cyhoeddodd y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol hefyd yn ddiweddar y bydd yn darparu cyfanswm o £133,000 dros y tair blynedd nesaf i gynorthwyo gweithgareddau craidd y Gymdeithas Awtistig Genedlaethol yng Nghymru.

Yng nghyd-destun addysg, mae'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol wedi cyhoeddi rhaglen weithredu anghenion addysgol arbennig ar gyfer Cymru. Nod y rhaglen hon yw gwella'r ddarpariaeth ar gyfer pob plentyn ag anghenion addysgol arbennig gan gynnwys plant ag anawsterau dysgu sy'n gysylltiedig ag awtistiaeth. Materion i'r awdurdodau addysg lleol, arbenigwyr iechyd ac anghenion addysgol arbennig, ysgolion a'u partneriaid statudol eu penderfynu'n lleol yw union natur y ddarpariaeth a sut y caiff ei threfnu a'i chyflenwi. Mae rhaglen weithredu'r Cynulliad yn annog datblygiad dulliau mwy cynhwysol o ddiwallu anghenion penodol plant. Serch hynny, mae hefyd yn cydnabod bod darpariaeth arbenigol o ansawdd uchel yn parhau i fod yn bwysig er mwyn cynorthwyo i ddiwallu anghenion addysgol plant ag anghenion arbennig mwy cymhleth sy'n gosod mwy o her.

Mae'r Cynulliad yn gweithio i sicrhau bod asiantaethau statudol yn cydweithio'n well o fewn rhanbarthau er mwyn cynllunio'u gwaith a diwallu anghenion plant ag anghenion arbennig llai cyffredin gan gynnwys awtistiaeth. Darparwyd arian i gefnogi tri phrosiect arbrofol ym maes cynllunio rhanbarthol ledled Cymru, a chyda'i gilydd byddant yn cynnwys y rhan fwyaf o ardaloedd awdurdodau addysg lleol Cymru. Un o brif swyddogaethau'r prosiectau hyn fydd nodi meysydd arbenigol cyfredol o fewn rhanbarthau y gellid eu rhannu'n fwy eang. Nod arall, wrth gwrs, yw nodi unrhyw fylchau yn y ddarpariaeth a chynllunio darpariaeth ar y cyd ar gyfer y dyfodol, os oes angen, er mwyn diwallu anghenion o'r fath yn fwy effeithiol.

Y llynedd, fe gyhoeddodd y Cynulliad y byddai'n rhoi cymorth cyfalaf o hyd at £2 filiwn ar gyfer ailddatblygu Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn yn Sir Ddinbych, fel canolfan arbenigol ranbarthol ar gyfer plant ag anhwylderau sbectrwm awtistig. Mae nifer o awdurdodau addysg lleol eisoes yn lleoli plant yn yr ysgol ac mae'r Cynulliad yn awyddus i sicrhau bod awdurdodau sy'n gwneud hynny yn ymuno â Sir Ddinbych i sicrhau llwyddiant cynaliadwy'r prosiect.

Y llynedd hefyd, fe gyhoeddodd Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru arweiniad newydd ar gyfer Cymru o'r enw 'Strwythur ar gyfer Llwyddo: Arweiniad ar y Cwricwlwm Cenedlaethol ac Anhwylder Sbectrwm Awtistig'. Paratowyd yr arweiniad mewn ymateb i geisiadau gan athrawon ac ysgolion ledled Cymru. Ei nod yw cynorthwyo i addysgu plant ag anhwylderau sbectrwm awtistig yn effeithiol mewn ysgolion prif ffrwd ac ysgolion arbennig.

Dealing with the Increase in Autism

Gareth Jones: What arrangements are in place to deal with the increase in autism in Wales? (WAQ10268)

Jane Davidson: It is for health and local authorities to provide for the needs of people with a diagnosis of autism living within their areas. As autism can vary greatly in its nature and severity, so services may

vary too. There may be any combination of specialist paediatric, child, adolescent and adult mental health and learning disability services, as well as support from the primary care team and input from different professions including education as well as health and social care. These are matters for local determination with those involved in the care of an individual.

The Department of Health has recently asked the Medical Research Council to conduct a detailed review of the current state of knowledge about autism and to suggest possible areas for future research. The aim is to obtain a clear and comprehensive picture of what is currently known about the incidence, prevalence and causes of autism and how strong the evidence is which underpins that knowledge. We support this initiative and will keep in close touch with this work as it progresses.

The Assembly itself has funded three pieces of research in the area of autism which have been concerned with different aspects of assessing and improving the communication skills of children with autism.

The National Assembly has also recently announced that it will be providing a total of £133,000 over the next three years to assist the core activities of the National Autistic Society in Wales.

In relation to education, the National Assembly has published a special educational needs action programme for Wales. This is aimed at improving provision for all children with special needs including children with learning difficulties associated with autism. The precise nature of the provision to be made and how it will be organised and delivered are matters for local determination by local education authorities, special education needs and health specialists, schools and their statutory partners. However, while the Assembly's action programme encourages the development of more inclusive approaches to meeting children's particular needs, it also recognises the continuing importance of good quality specialist provision in helping to meet the educational needs of children with more challenging and complex special needs.

The Assembly is working to establish stronger regional collaboration between statutory agencies in planning and meeting the needs of children with low incidence special needs including autism. Funding has been made available to support three regional planning pilot projects across Wales, which together include the majority of local education authority areas in Wales. One of the primary roles of these projects is to identify existing specialisms within regions, which can be shared more widely. Another corresponding aim, of course, is to identify any gaps in provision and, if necessary, to plan future provision collectively to meet such needs more effectively.

Last year, the Assembly announced capital support of up to £2 million towards the re-development of Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn in Denbighshire as a regional specialist centre for children with autistic spectrum disorders. Several local education authorities already place children at the school and the Assembly is keen to ensure that placing authorities join forces with Denbighshire in making the project a sustainable success.

Last year also saw the publication of new guidance by the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales entitled 'A Structure for Success: Guidance on the National Curriculum and Autistic Spectrum Disorder'. The guidance was prepared in response to requests from teachers and schools throughout Wales. Its aims are to support the effective teaching and learning of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders in mainstream and special schools.

Questions to the Minister for Environment

More Detailed and Relevant Survey Results of the Gower Beaches

Janet Davies: Is there additional funding available to provide more detailed and relevant survey results of the Gower beaches? (WAQ9895)

The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex): All potential environmental impacts are thoroughly considered in the environmental impact assessment that accompanies each application to dredge for sand. The hydrodynamics and the sedimentology are considered in another study designed specifically to look at potential impacts on the coastline.

Each contemporary Government view (and hence each licence) comes with a raft of strict environmental monitoring conditions. These include; bathymetric surveys of the sand source (usually a sandbank), beach profiling to measure long-term trends, cliff-face profiling where appropriate, and state-of-the-art detailed terrain modelling of all the beaches in Gower from Rhossili to Three Cliffs Bay—this latter technique now allowing us to quantify changes in volume at any given location. These survey methods used give us detailed and relevant information. All this data is used to inform policy and decision-making.

Detailed Surveying Programmes of the Gower Beaches

David Lloyd: Has the Assembly any plans to fund continuous detailed surveying programmes of the Gower beaches, to establish any links between sand dredging and beach erosion? (WAQ9896)

Sue Essex: I refer you to the answer to (WAQ9895) (Janet Davies, South Wales West).

The existing survey methods employed provide efficient and relevant environmental monitoring of the Gower beaches adjacent to the offshore dredging operations on a regular basis. The Assembly has, and is continuing to fund research in relation to the hydrodynamics of the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary, and the way in which marine aggregates extraction and other activities may affect it. We are developing policy based on some of this research which will provide a unique framework for determining any future applications to dredge. This will be out for public consultation in the spring.

Congestion Charging

Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on any plans to introduce congestion charging? (WAQ10048)

Sue Essex: The Transport Act 2000 makes provision for local authorities to introduce congestion charging. The power is discretionary and subject to Assembly approval. There is also limited power for the introduction of trunk road charges complementary to local authority charging schemes. At the present time no local authority has approached the Assembly with a plan to introduce congestion charging.

Lonydd Goddiweddyd neu Lonydd Ymlusgo Ychwanegol

Dafydd Wigley: A wnaiff y Gweinidog gyllido astudiaeth bellach i'r posibilrwydd o ddarparu lonydd goddiweddyd neu lonydd ymlusgo ychwanegol ar yr A470 a'r A483 a'r A487 i wella amgylchiadau teithio ar ffyrdd gogledd-de yng Nghymru? (WAQ10051) [W] [R]

Sue Essex: Nid oes gennyf gynlluniau i ariannu astudiaeth bellach i wella amodau ar ffyrdd gogledd-de yng Nghymru. Ym mis Mai 2000, cawsom adroddiad Babbie ar y cysylltiadau trafniadaeth gogledd-de. Bydd canfyddiadau'r adroddiad yn cael eu dwyn i ystyriaeth wrth ddatblygu'r rhaglen cefnffyrdd yn dilyn cytuno ar y fframwaith drafniadaeth ar gyfer Cymru a fydd yn destun trafodaeth ac ymgynghori maes o law.

Additional Overtaking or Crawler Lanes

Dafydd Wigley: Will the Minister fund a further study into the possibility of providing additional overtaking lanes or crawler lanes on the A470, A483 and A487 to improve the travelling conditions on the north-south roads in Wales? (WAQ10051) [W] [R]

Sue Essex: I have no plans to fund a further study into improving conditions on north-south roads in Wales. We received Babbie's north-south transport links report covering this issue in May 2000. The findings of the report will be taken into consideration in the development of the trunk road programme following the agreement of the transport framework for Wales that will be subject to debate and consultation shortly.

Speeches for Plenary

David Davies: Is the Minister wholly responsible for writing her speeches for Plenary debate? (WAQ10084)

Sue Essex: I am responsible for the content of speeches that I deliver and will take advice from appropriate sources in the preparation of my speeches.

Tackling the Consequences of Flooding

Nick Bourne: What measures are in place to tackle the consequences of flooding in Wales? (WAQ10224)

Sue Essex: There are a number of measures in place to tackle the consequences of flooding in Wales. From the Assembly they include:

- Bellwin assistance towards additional costs suffered by local authorities;
- exceptional payments towards the Environment Agency's additional expenditure;
- additional funds and increased grant rates for capital works to restore and improve flood defences on rivers;
- a review of arrangements to tackle flooding.

In addition, local authorities, the Environment Agency and others are undertaking work within their functional responsibilities to assist with the recovery and to improve future response to such events by seeing what lessons can be learned from the recent one.

The Historic Buildings Council for Wales

David Melding: Does the Minister have any plans for the reform or abolition of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales? (WAQ10230)

David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on the work of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales? (WAQ10231)

Sue Essex: The Historic Buildings Council for Wales is an Assembly sponsored public body, which the Assembly is required, by statute, to consult before making any grant for the repair of a building of outstanding historic or architectural interest or for repairs which preserve or enhance the appearance of a conservation area. Its work in providing independent advice on the merits of historic buildings is described in the annual reports it is required by legislation to present to the Assembly, copies of which are in the Library.

In her statement of 21 December 2000, the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities indicated that the council would be reviewed in 2002-03.

A Hybrid Light Railway in Cardiff

Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister have discussions with the companies competing for the all-Wales rail franchise to encourage them to provide a hybrid light railway to operate within Cardiff and to link the capital with towns in the Valleys? (WAQ10278)

Sue Essex: The Assembly Government shares the aspiration of the South Wales Integrated Fast Transit Consortium of local authorities to achieve eight services per hour to Cardiff Bay from Cardiff Queen Street. We have made it clear, both through our published bidders pack and in officials' discussions with all the shortlisted bidders, that we are looking to the successful operator of the Wales and Borders franchise to deliver this commitment.

As part of the redevelopment of Bute Square, Assembly officials have been working with Cardiff City and County Council, the Welsh Development Agency, Railtrack, Valley Lines and the Strategic Rail Authority on how the development may impact on Herbert Street railway bridge and the track. One option is to replace the existing heavy rail link with a light rail system, capable of running at street level to the bay, and mixing with heavy rail at Queen Street. A feasibility study should be completed by August 2001, and we will continue to keep franchise bidders informed of progress.

Improving Provision in the Planning Process

Kirsty Williams: Does the Minister have any plans to improve provision in the planning process to better publicise proposed developments and other measures to democratise the process? (WAQ10359)

Sue Essex: Assembly planning policy is prepared using an open, inclusive and integrated process in accordance with the Assembly's commitment in 'Betterwales.com'. Public consultation on policies in the Assembly's draft Planning Policy Wales began on 27 February.

Local planning authorities have responsibility for development plans and for decisions on planning applications. They must publicise and consult on these in accordance with statutory requirements and the Assembly's guidance, which emphasises the importance of openness and inclusion.

These requirements, and the Assembly's guidance, are kept under review to ensure that they continue to provide for effective public involvement in the planning process.

Free Bus Travel

Val Feld: Will the Minister please indicate the amounts of subsidy for free bus passes and free bus travel contributed by the National Assembly and local authorities in Wales? (WAQ10367)

Sue Essex: The Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that from April 2001, free concessionary passes will be available to pensioners and disabled people to entitle them to travel on local bus passes with at least 50 per cent discount on fares. From April 2002, pensioners and disabled people will be entitled to free travel on buses.

The budget approved by the Assembly on 7 December provided £1.2 million for the introduction of free passes in 2001-02, followed by £16.2 million to £21.2 million in 2002-03, 2003-04 respectively for free passes and free travel. This will be distributed through the local authority revenue settlement, and will be kept under review.

Questions to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

Relocating Denbighshire County Council Offices

Nick Bourne: Are there any plans underway to relocate Denbighshire County Council offices and, if so, where will they be relocated? (WAQ10101)

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): I refer you to my reply to WAQ10100. One of the arguments put forward by Denbighshire County Council in support of its proposed private finance initiative scheme to build new council offices in Ruthin is that it would enable it to relocate council staff who are currently accommodated in offices outside the county.

Breaking Up the County of Denbighshire

Nick Bourne: Is the Minister aware of any plans to break up the county of Denbighshire and divide it between Conwy and Delyn? (WAQ10102)

Edwina Hart: I am not aware of any plans to change the principal areas of local government in Wales.

Llangollen Boundary Review

Nick Bourne: Can the Minister report on the latest developments on the Llangollen boundary review? (WAQ10103)

Edwina Hart: The review of the boundary between the county of Denbighshire and the county borough of Wrexham in the Llangollen area is being carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales and is due to be completed by 31 October this year.

Job Advertising for ASPBs

Glyn Davies: What has been the total amount of money spent by the National Assembly on job advertising for Assembly sponsored public bodies? (WAQ10227)

Edwina Hart: The National Assembly does not undertake advertising for jobs in Assembly sponsored public bodies.

Welsh Telecommunications Network

David Davies: Are there plans to invest in the Welsh telecommunications network? (WAQ10263)
Transferred for answer by the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economic Development.

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economic Development (Michael German): The National Assembly recognises that information communications technology has, and will continue to have, a key role in transforming the Welsh economy. The effective use and take up of ICT features predominantly in the Assembly's approach to economic and community regeneration in Wales. This is set out in 'Putting Wales First', which reaffirms the Assembly's commitment to ICT and in particular encourages the use and take up of new technologies and electronic business. In addition, under the Llwybr/Pathway project, public sector funds have been used in the past to improve the network in rural areas.

The Assembly is committed to the target set out in 'UK online: the broadband future', published jointly by Cabinet Office and the Department of Trade and Industry last month, of the UK having the most extensive and competitive broadband market in G7. A UK-wide broadband fund is being established to help achieve this, which will assist with broadband feasibility studies. The Assembly will be working with the Welsh Development Agency to stimulate bids in Wales. Work is already underway, led by the Assembly, on possibly aggregating the public sector demand in Wales.

Furthermore, a WDA-led study is underway to review the current environment for broadband access in Wales. It aims to identify and evaluate policy options and provide recommendations to optimise the use of structural funds.

Job Advertising Costs

Glyn Davies: Further to the answer to WAQ9363 what was the individual cost of advertising in each of the publications listed? (WAQ10264)

Edwina Hart: The cost of advertising the special adviser posts in each of the publications listed was:

The Western Mail	£4,329.21
The Liverpool Daily Post	£1,935.91
Golwg	£396.38
Y Cymro	£407.30
The Guardian	£2,516.85
The Liberal Democrat News	£877.50

Please note that the total cost was £10,463.15. The reason for the difference between this and the figure of £10,307.40 given in my previous answer is that the earlier figure included one estimated rather than actual figure.

Costs of Best Value

David Davies: What are the costs, to date, for implementing the Best Value scheme in Wales? (WAQ10265)

Edwina Hart: The National Assembly provides direct grant to the Audit Commission's Best Value Inspectorate to cover part of the cost of Best Value inspections. In 2000-01, the level of grant was £1.35 million. In 2001-02, that will rise to £1.65 million.

Similar amounts, additional to the local government revenue settlement, were placed in the revenue support grant to meet the extra cost of best value inspection. An additional £500,000 in each of these financial years has been placed in revenue support grant to cover the extra cost of the audit of Best Value performance plans.

Figures are not held for the cost to individual Best Value authorities, but I would expect that, over time, the efficiency savings that Best Value will produce will more than offset the cost to authorities.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

'Improving Health in Wales'

David Melding: When will the Minister for Health and Social Services outline which district general hospitals are likely to close or be downgraded, further to the statement on page 16 of 'Improving Health in Wales' that 'we will see an overall reduction in the number of traditional hospitals?' (WAQ9803)

David Melding: Can the Minister give an assurance that the number of accident and emergency departments in Wales will not be cut, given the changing role of district general hospitals, as identified on page 14 of 'Improving Health in Wales'? (WAQ9805)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): I will answer these questions together. The 'Improving Health in Wales' plan does not signal an intention to close and downgrade hospitals and services, but our intention to bring about a health service that fits its purpose in the twenty-first century. 'Access and Excellence' identified a secure future for the network of 17 major acute hospitals in Wales (of which 15 have full accident and emergency departments) but also recognised that over time the role of individual institutions would change and that the network would ultimately evolve into a different service model.

Leadership Centre for Health

David Melding: To what extent will the new Leadership Centre for Health in England be open to staff from NHS Cymru? (WAQ10017)

Jane Hutt: Wales will have its own leadership centre for health from 1 April 2001, when NHS Staff College Wales expands its current role and becomes the Health Leadership Centre for Wales. One of its key aims will be to develop the leadership capability of current leaders (professionals and managers), and to nurture the next generation of leaders. Plans are already in hand to extend the range of services offered to the NHS and to key partner agencies, especially local authorities. New methods of delivery are being developed, particularly an e-learning strategy, which will broaden the delivery of common professional development and other forms of training. The NHS Staff College has already developed strong links with other leading health organisations across the UK, and we expect it to work in close collaboration with its new sister organisation, the new Leadership Centre for Health in England.

Classifying the Status of Hospitals

David Melding: Will the Commission for Health Improvement be permitted to classify the status of hospitals in Wales, after appraisal in 'red', 'yellow' or 'green' categories?(WAQ10019)

Jane Hutt: The Commission for Health Improvement is an independent body. However, it will take into account differences in the performance management mechanisms in operation in England and Wales.

It is not currently intended to introduce a 'traffic light' system for NHS Wales. As indicated in 'Improving Health in Wales', performance improvement will be through other mechanisms, particularly a new performance management framework, which will drive up effectiveness in facilities and service management, guide NHS organisations towards best practice, encourage innovation and focus on patients' health problems and experiences.

National Children's Hospital for Wales

David Melding: Has the administration set aside capital funding for the construction of a national children's hospital for Wales? (WAQ10021)

Jane Hutt: Proposals to develop a children's hospital in Cardiff have been under development for some years. In broad terms, these proposals would lead to the development of a children's hospital on the University Hospital of Wales site. Such a development is intended to achieve the rationalisation of acute paediatric services for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan and would provide tertiary paediatric services further afield.

In December 1999 the Assembly gave its approval for a limited development involving the construction of two new paediatric wards of 24 beds each on land adjacent to the existing children's unit at the University Hospital of Wales, together with facilities for children's ear, nose and throat out-patient services. This approval has been given on the basis that the health authority will meet the revenue costs and the capital costs of approximately £3.7 million will be funded entirely from charitable donations. The Children's Hospital for Wales appeal, which is taking the appeal forward, is confident that raising this sum will not present any major problems.

The wider scheme for a children's hospital, proposing a three phase development with a total capital cost of some £21million, could include:

- demolition of existing paediatric wards on the UHW site and construction of a new in-patient facility,

- enhancement of out-patient services with transfer of the children's ear, nose and throat out-patients into the new accommodation,
- inclusion of an integral twin theatre suite for paediatric surgery.

While Bro Taf Health Authority has given its support to the initial development, it has reserved its position on the wider scheme proposals, which would require public consultation.

During the trust's development of the scheme's business case, the use of the private finance initiative will be considered as a means of funding the proposals. Only when the possibility of a PFI negotiated deal is considered unlikely will the use of public capital be considered. The proposals will then be considered against other urgent or essential proposals from across Wales.

Linear Accelerators

David Melding: How many new linear accelerators will be provided in Wales by 2004? (WAQ10025)

Jane Hutt: Welsh NHS trusts are responsible for equipment replacement. In the past, the level of discretionary capital made available to trusts has meant that, in many cases, existing equipment has been repaired rather than replaced at the proper time.

In 'Improving Health in Wales' I have indicated that work will be commissioned by March 2001 to establish, by November 2001, an inventory of major items of equipment across the NHS in Wales, and a process to enable strategic management of replacement investment by the Assembly and its partner organisations. The replacement of outdated major life-saving equipment will be addressed as a priority.

Swansea NHS Trust is the only trust to have submitted a formal business case for the replacement of ageing linear accelerators. The trust's business case includes the specific replacement of the two older linear accelerators in Singleton Hospital by 2004 and asks the Assembly to also consider replacing the third one. A decision will be made shortly.

Linking Funding with Patient Survey Results

David Melding: Will the Minister link some funding of NHS organisations in Wales to the results of regular patient surveys? (WAQ10029)

Jane Hutt: 'Improving Health in Wales' strengthens patients' role in decisions about their health and the services provided. Patient surveys are just one component of the new direction, which will also include a revised health and social care charter, more and better information for patients, an annual prospectus on services in primary and secondary care and better ways of engaging the public directly in decision-taking. This programme will underpin the process of continual improvement throughout the NHS and will be funded from a variety of sources.

NHS Cymru's Estate

David Melding: What proportion of NHS Cymru's estate will be less than 15 years old by 2010? (WAQ10031)

Jane Hutt: It is not possible to determine accurately the likely age of the NHS estate in 2010. 'Improving Health in Wales' has, as a key action, a target that 'by December 2001, each trust will have estate strategies in place'. The full implications of 'Improving Health in Wales' have yet to be worked through by health authorities and trusts. We will be able to take a fresh view of this after trusts' estate strategies are submitted at the end of the year.

Welsh-speaking Board Members

David Melding: Will the Minister set a goal that all boards serving a community in which more than 10 per cent of the population is Welsh speaking should have at least one Welsh speaking board member, under the Policy for the Appointment of Chairs and Non-executive Directors, to the boards of health authorities and NHS trusts? (WAQ10098)

Jane Hutt: I agree that it is essential that we work to ensure that a health body that resides in an area with a predominant Welsh speaking population should have available to its board people who speak Welsh. I will initiate discussions at the Assembly and within the service on the setting of goals in this regard and will report on the outcome.

Monitoring Levels of Welsh-speaking Board Members

David Melding: Will the Minister instruct the National Assembly's NHS appointments branch to introduce indicators to monitor the levels of Welsh speaking board members, under the Policy for the Appointment of Chairs and Non-executive Directors, to the boards of health authorities and NHS trusts? (WAQ10099)

Jane Hutt: Yes.

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy

Alun Cairns: What support is available for patients who have been treated with hyperbaric oxygen therapy? (WAQ10217)

Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on hyperbaric oxygen treatment? (WAQ10218)

Alun Cairns: What representation has the Minister received from patients or charitable groups in relation to hyperbaric oxygen therapy? (WAQ10219)

Alun Cairns: What analysis has the Minister made of hyperbaric oxygen therapy? (WAQ10220)

Jane Hutt: I will answer all four questions together. Hyperbaric oxygen therapy is a specialised form of treatment, appropriate for a number of conditions. The treatment is not currently provided by any NHS trust within Wales and the very small number of patients which require it each year are transferred to the small number of hospitals in England which provide it.

I have not received representations from patients or charitable groups on hyperbaric oxygen therapy. I have, however, had correspondence from a private company, which is discussing proposals to establish a hyperbaric oxygen therapy facility at Morrison Hospital with Swansea NHS Trust.

Resources for Cancer Prevention

Nick Bourne: Does the Minister have any plans to allocate more resources to cancer prevention in Wales? (WAQ10225)

Nick Bourne: What is being done in the field of cancer prevention in Wales? (WAQ10226)

Jane Hutt: I will answer these two questions together. The Assembly is addressing cancer prevention through a number of health promotion initiatives. Some of these target known risk factors, for example by helping smokers to give up smoking or by encouraging healthy eating. Others incorporate a cancer prevention theme into broader health promotion activity, for example through the corporate standard for health, which addresses workplace health issues. The Assembly also supports the annual UK Europe against cancer week campaign.

Subject to the Assembly's decisions, the resources available to support action to promote health, including cancer prevention will increase. The health promotion programmes budget is planned to increase from £0.827 million in 2000-01 to £1.745 million in 2001-02 and £1.846 million in 2003-04. The tobacco control budget available to support smoking prevention and cessation is planned to increase from £1.75 million in 2000-01 to £2.112 million by 2003-04. In addition, the New Opportunities Fund will look to continue to support cancer prevention projects.

Safeguarding Financial Assets (People with Learning Disabilities in Care Homes)

Kirsty Williams: What steps does the Minister intend to take to safeguard the financial assets of people with learning disabilities in residential care homes? (WAQ10234)

Jane Hutt: 'Home Life: a code of practice for residential care' contains a section on financial affairs. This guidance was first published in 1984 and was developed with a traditional model of residential care in mind. Assembly officials are in contact with the Department of Health to consider the need to develop guidance, which reflects the changing patterns of service delivery.

Registration and Inspection Units (Residential Homes for People with Learning Difficulties)

Kirsty Williams: What steps does the Minister intend to take to ensure the adequate performance of registration and inspection units which deal with residential homes for people with learning disabilities? (WAQ10235)

Jane Hutt: In considering the performance of registration and inspection units, we need to distinguish clearly between the current regulatory and inspecting arrangements, and the new arrangements which come into force on 1 April 2002 with the care standards inspectorate for Wales.

At present, the primary managerial responsibility for the operation of the registration and inspection units rests with local authorities in their capacity as registration authorities. Each registration and inspection unit is responsible for producing an annual report of its work. Under the terms of the citizen's charter, each local authority is required to commission an annual independent report on the operations of its unit and how the local authority responds to inspection reports on its own directly provided services.

The Social Services Inspectorate for Wales, which is a division of the National Assembly, conducts an annual monitoring of registration and inspection units and from time to time has undertaken thematic inspections of the work of units across Wales. The Social Services Inspectorate has undertaken ad-hoc inspections of units where there are particular causes for concern. Appeals against decisions made by the registration and inspection units are a matter for the Registered Homes Tribunal.

From 1 April 2002, responsibility for the registration and inspection of all types of residential care homes, including those for people with learning disabilities, will transfer from local authorities to the care standards inspectorate for Wales, a new division of the National Assembly. The care standards inspectorate will be responsible for regulating a variety of social care and independent healthcare settings in the public and private sector. The basis for the new inspectorate's work will be all-Wales regulations and national minimum standards, which will need to be approved by the Assembly as pieces of subordinate legislation. The care standards inspectorate will inspect all residential homes at least once a year, which will be an improvement on current arrangements since there is at present no obligation to inspect small residential homes following their registration. The care standards inspectorate for Wales will contribute, in future, a new overview about the care sector for inclusion in the annual report by the Chief Inspector of Social Services in Wales.

Waiting List Figures

Peter Rogers: Will the Minister elaborate on her reply to WAQ10039 and say whether waiting list figures in north Wales are in line with the 'agreed targets' to which she refers? (WAQ10236)

Jane Hutt: Waiting list targets were agreed with the NHS in May 2000, including a reduction in the total in-patient/day case waiting list by some 15,000 to approximately 65,000. Each health authority took responsibility for managing the efforts in its area. Waiting lists are influenced by the interplay of several elements such as demand, capacity, practice and the ability of patients and staff to attend hospital. Unforeseen movements in any of these can help or hinder efforts to reduce waiting lists. Latest indications from north Wales give grounds for optimism that they can come close to this target, but I cannot guarantee this.

Practice Premises Working Group

Geraint Davies: When will the report of the practice premises working group be produced, in particular its recommendations for the financing of practice developments in deprived areas? (WAQ10277)

Jane Hutt: The report is complete and with officials. It will be sent to me in the next few days and I will arrange for it to be made available to interested parties.

‘Improving Health in Wales’ (Joint Working)

Nick Bourne: What steps is the Minister taking to ensure joint working in NHS Wales? (WAQ10360)

Jane Hutt: ‘Improving Health in Wales’ recognises that joint working is an essential plank in the renewal of the NHS in Wales. It requires working across organisational boundaries between the NHS, local authorities, the independent and voluntary sectors in social care and other relevant services such as housing and education.

Chapter 4 of the plan, ‘Partnerships for Health: joint working’, discusses this issue in detail and sets out a range of actions that will strengthen and extend partnership working. This will be underpinned by a new set of public service accountabilities, which will form part of the new performance management frameworks for health and social services. Local health groups will, over the next two years, progressively take the lead in developing partnerships and implementing the new Health Act 1999 flexibilities. Local strategic partnership boards will also be established between the NHS and local government to ensure synergy in planning processes and the delivery of well co-ordinated services.

Implementation of the plan is being closely managed by the Assembly through a framework that involves our partners at every level. Joint working will be considered by a task and finish group which will prepare a detailed programme of action to ensure that this important area of work is developed effectively and that the full potential of partnerships in Wales is realised.

Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs

GM Seeds in Seed of Conventional Varieties (Consultation)

Mick Bates: What plans does the Minister for Rural Affairs have to hold a consultation in Wales equivalent to that being conducted at www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/agriculture/gmseeds_lett.asp on the European Commission working document on the adventitious presence of genetically modified seeds in seed of conventional varieties? (WAQ10008)

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Carwyn Jones): Our consultation paper will be issued shortly.

Reducing the Regulation Burden on the Farming Sector

David Davies: What steps is the Minister taking to reduce the regulation burden on the farming sector? (WAQ10082)

Carwyn Jones: I am committed to reducing the regulatory burden on farmers, subject to the need for sensible controls to assure the health and welfare of animals and the safety of food products. The action plan arising from our customer survey last year sets out our priorities for improving our administration of European grant and subsidy schemes. For example, officials are currently reviewing whether the number of on-farm inspections can be reduced and also ways of standardising and simplifying application forms for the schemes. As an interim measure we have introduced a more concise version of the beef special premium scheme application form by reducing it from 12 pages to four. My officials have held records clinics and open-evenings at locations throughout Wales to help farmers understand what documentation they are required to provide.

Responsibility for Writing Plenary Debates

David Davies: Is the Minister wholly responsible for writing his speeches for Plenary debate? (WAQ10083)

Carwyn Jones: I am responsible for the content of speeches that I deliver and will take advice from appropriate sources in the preparation of my speeches.

Foot and Mouth Disease (Wales)

Peter Rogers: When and by what means was the Minister informed of the first suspected case of foot and mouth in Wales? (WAQ10232)

Carwyn Jones: Officials from the Agriculture Department contacted me by telephone shortly after 5.00 p. m. on Sunday, 25 February.

Foot and Mouth Disease (England)

Peter Rogers: When and by what means was the Minister informed of the first suspected case of foot-and-mouth in England (WAQ10233)

Carwyn Jones: Officials from the Agriculture Department sent advice by e-mail shortly before 5.00pm on Tuesday, 20 February.

Compensation to Farmers (Flooding)

David Davies: Have arrangements been made to compensate farmers who suffered losses as a result of recent flooding? (WAQ10274)

Carwyn Jones: Any decision to compensate farmers for the recent floods would be subject to the approval of the European Commission. We have investigated the options and concluded that there is insufficient technical and meteorological data to make a case to the Commission at present.