

Written Questions answered from 4 to 11 May 2000

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

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Questions to the Secretary for Health and Social Services

Funding for Health Authorities in Wales

Peter Rogers: What will be done to ensure that funding for health authorities in Wales is equal to funding for health authorities in England, given that Wales's increase in allocations is 6 per cent and England's is 8 per cent? (WAQ4167)

The Secretary for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): The overall percentage increase in the 2000-01 health authority allocations has increased to 9.4 per cent following the new budget money.

Dyfed Powys Health Authority (Debt Position)

Nick Bourne: What proposals is Jane Hutt bringing forward to deal with the debt position of Dyfed Powys Health Authority? (WAQ4534)

Jane Hutt: Dyfed Powys Health Authority and its four host trusts are finalising draft recovery plans which aim to return the region to financial balance by the end of 2002-03, with loan repayments commencing thereafter in 2003-04 by way of a corporately agreed annual top-slicing mechanism.

The additional resources for health announced by the Chancellor in the budget speech will undoubtedly assist the NHS in Wales in dealing with its financial problems. Detailed proposals for the use of those resources are in preparation, but it is nevertheless essential that the momentum towards the development and implementation of recovery plans is maintained.

People with Learning Difficulties (Services)

Owen John Thomas: How will Jane Hutt ensure that the Assembly is satisfied that the services provided for people with learning difficulties, particularly residential care, are suitable to all their needs? (WAQ4716)

Jane Hutt: Local authorities in Wales are responsible for registering and inspecting residential homes for people with learning disabilities under the Residential Homes Act 1984 and related statutory guidance. Local authorities must ensure that their services continue to meet the needs of people as part of their normal service/contracts monitoring, evaluation and securing best value.

The Care Standards Bill currently before Parliament will, subject to Royal Assent, provide for the Assembly to become the regulator for a wide range of social care services, including all residential care for people with learning disabilities, from April 2002. Local authorities will be required to register their care homes, which will be subject to the same inspection and enforcement procedures as voluntary and private care homes.

People with Learning Disabilities (Assessment Process)

Owen John Thomas: How will Jane Hutt ensure that people with learning disabilities and their carers are properly informed about the importance of the assessment process, their role in it and the range of options available? (WAQ4717)

Jane Hutt: In addition to our strategy guidance which has been widely disseminated and the advice/information available from statutory agencies, the Assembly also provides grant assistance to organisations that provide information and other support to people with learning disabilities; their families and carers. These organisations include People First Wales, the All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers, Mencap in Wales, the National Autistic Society and the Standing Conference of Voluntary Organisations for people with a learning disability in Wales. A recent example of helping to ensure that

people have access to information was the support the Assembly was able to give to Mencap in Wales for its free phone learning disability helpline which was launched on 28 March 2000.

Long-term Residential Care Placements

Owen John Thomas: In view of the variations existing between local authorities concerning funding of long-term residential care placements and the consequential effect on bed-blocking, will Jane Hutt seek to introduce a fair and equitable system throughout Wales? (WAQ4824)

Jane Hutt: This issue spans both devolved and non-devolved matters. The Secretary of State for Health has indicated that, following the current spending review, he intends to issue a White Paper in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on long-term care. In the light of that response we will be considering what further action needs to be taken in Wales.

Extra Moneys for the NHS in Wales

David Davies: When will Jane Hutt be receiving the extra moneys allocated to the NHS in Wales as a result of the tobacco duty announced in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's 2000-01 budget? (WAQ4883)

Jane Hutt: The tobacco duty formed part of the additional £99 million allocated to Wales following the Chancellor's budget statement. Some £19 million of this extra funding has been issued to health authorities as part of their 2000-01 allocation. Some £80 million remains unspent at present, and is therefore available to address health spending priorities in Wales. These will be established following discussion with the NHS and the Health and Social Services Committee.

Beds in the NHS

David Davies: How many beds are currently within the NHS in Wales, and how does the figure compare to the figure from 1997 onwards, broken down by quarter? (WAQ4895)

Jane Hutt: The information provided by the NHS, relating to the average daily number of available beds in each quarter to the quarter ending December 1999 (the latest available), is given in the following table.

Average Daily Available Beds

Quarter Ending	Number
March 1997	15,340
June 1997	15,185
September 1997	15,208
December 1997	15,132
March 1998	15,193
June 1998	15,008
September 1998	14,908
December 1998	14,815
March 1999	14,857
June 1999	14,878
September 1999	14,755
December 1999	14,694

Source: Health Solutions Wales

Treating MRSA

David Lloyd: Does any guidance on the treatment of Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus exist in the NHS in Wales and will Jane Hutt undertake to standardise such guidance across Wales in the light of best practice? (WAQ4899)

Jane Hutt: Extensive guidance has been issued in the past to the NHS in Wales both in hospital and nursing home settings on hospital acquired infection and in particular MRSA.

One particular set of guidelines published in 1998 in the *Journal of Hospital Infection* (Vol. 39, pages 253-290) has been adopted across the UK as the model for best practice. This guidance by the joint working party of the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy, The Hospital Infection Society and the Infection Control Nurses Association is entitled 'Revised Guidelines for the Control of Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus Infection in Hospitals'.

This guidance together with the two projects currently underway in Wales, which are looking at nosocomial infections and specifically surveillance of MRSA cases, go some way to ensuring that hospital cases of MRSA are kept to a minimum.

The Welsh hospital infection strategy group is examining the management and control of hospital infections. Examples of initiatives currently being investigated are a three-year programme of improvement to be monitored through the communicable disease strategy group, formal annual reviews by health trusts of their arrangements for infection control and action by health authorities to ensure that robust arrangements are in place which provide for the implementation of clinical governance.

NHS Direct

David Lloyd: Will the software provided for the operation of NHS Direct be available in Welsh, and if so, when will it become available? (WAQ4900)

Jane Hutt: The software provided for the operation of NHS Direct is not available in Welsh at present.

Publishing the National Carers' Strategy

David Lloyd: When will the national carers' strategy be published for consultation? (WAQ4901)

Jane Hutt: The UK national strategy for carers, 'Caring about Carers', was published last year after extensive consultation which drew substantially on the Welsh experience. We have consulted on the carers' strategy in Wales's implementation plan. I propose to launch this document during National Carers' week which starts on 12 June in parallel with the Plenary debate on the carers' special grant which is designed to give additional financial assistance for breaks for carers.

New Policy on Learning Disability

Nick Bourne: Will Jane Hutt ensure that human rights are built into new policy on learning disability? (WAQ4904)

Jane Hutt: Yes I will. The Assembly's learning disability strategy is already based around the key principles that people with learning disabilities have a right to an ordinary pattern of life within the community, the right to be treated as an individual and the right to additional help and support in developing their maximum potential. The Assembly has established a learning disability advisory group to draft a service framework and I am sure that the issue of how people with learning disabilities can exercise their rights by themselves or with support is being taken fully into account in their work. In

addition, the Assembly is required to ensure that in exercising its functions it complies with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Provisions for People with Learning Disabilities and their Families

Nick Bourne: Will Jane Hutt ensure that people with learning disabilities and their families are given choice in the provisions made for them, particularly in relation to residential care? (WAQ4905)

Jane Hutt: The Assembly's learning disability strategy already promotes choice and for the individual to be able to express a preference, whether that be in relation to residential provision or other services or support for an individual. Ultimately it is for local authorities to determine matters, taking into account their statutory responsibilities, identified needs, the views and preferences of the individual, the views of family/carers, the Assembly's learning disability strategy guidance and Best Value considerations.

Car Parking Fees (Hospitals)

David Davies: How many hospitals charge car parking fees for patients and/or staff, and which hospitals are they? (WAQ4915)

Jane Hutt: Information on charges levied for parking at hospitals across the whole of Wales is not held centrally. The introduction of such charges at a hospital and the rate levied are matters determined by individual trusts, taking account of local circumstances.

Questions to the Secretary for the Environment, Planning and Transport

Funding of Wildlife Trusts

Nick Bourne: Will the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Planning make a statement regarding funding of wildlife trusts throughout Wales by the Countryside Council for Wales? (WAQ4478)

The Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Planning (Sue Essex): The Countryside Council for Wales provides grant aid to wildlife trusts throughout Wales for various wildlife and countryside purposes including managing and improving access to nature reserves for disabled people.

For 2000-01, negotiations are continuing between the council and wildlife trusts on the level of funding, though I understand approximately £165,000 is available. It is a matter for the council to decide how it allocates its resources within the budget provided to it by the Assembly.

Disposal of Household Waste

Nick Bourne: What proposals will Sue Essex be bringing forward for the disposal of household waste with the closure of landfill sites? (WAQ4529)

Sue Essex: Michael Meacher and I will be publishing the waste strategy for Wales and England shortly. It will set out the broad framework within which waste policy is expected to develop over the next 20 years. However, I am already committed to the development, in 2001-02, of a detailed implementation strategy, which will focus more specifically on Welsh circumstances. This will be directed towards greater waste minimisation, increased re-use and recycling, all of which are essential to meeting our obligations under the European landfill directive.

Llandrindod Wells (Planning Appeal)

Nick Bourne: Has Sue Essex received any representation from people in the Llandrindod Wells area

about the planning appeal for a block of flats on the land next to Rock Park? (WAQ4909)

Sue Essex: This appeal was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 2 June 1998 and is proceeding by way of an exchange of written representations. A site visit by one of the Inspectorate's inspectors took place on Monday 10 April and his decision will be issued in due course.

There have been many representations received from local residents, which the inspector will take into account as he makes his decision.

The Size of the Buffer Zone between Opencast Excavations and Sensitive Areas

Nick Bourne: Will Sue Essex make a statement about the size of the buffer zone between opencast excavations and sensitive areas as recommended in the National Assembly for Wales's Mineral Planning Guidance, referring in particular to the equivalent guidance for Scotland? (WAQ4910)

Sue Essex: The draft Minerals Planning Guidance (Wales) Planning Policy, MPG(W), issued for consultation in November 1999 and the observations and comments received are still being considered. When this is completed, the MPG(W) will be published, and it is hoped that a draft technical advice note on coal will be issued at about the same time. This will address planning matters relating to coal, including the concept of buffer zones and the use of this instrument in Scotland, and taking into account all other factors.

Questions to the Secretary for Education and Children

The Children (Performances) Regulations 1968

David Lloyd: When will Section 6 of the Children (Performances) Regulations 1968 be revoked in Wales and will the Secretary for Education and Children make a statement? (WAQ4903)

The Secretary for Education and Children (Rosemary Butler): I am aware that this regulation was revoked in England (but not in Wales or Scotland) on 1 February so as to remove certain restrictions on public performances by children. Jane Hutt and I will consider at the earliest opportunity whether to recommend that the Assembly should introduce these changes in Wales, having regard to the interests of those children who wish to take part in public performances and the need to safeguard their health, welfare and education.

Questions to the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development

Specified Risk Material Order 1997

Glyn Davies: What powers does the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development or the Assembly have to change the specified risk material order 1997 unilaterally in respect of the export of whole ewe carcasses? (WAQ3181)

The Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development (Christine Gwyther): Further to my interim reply of 17 February, export of whole ewe carcasses to specified abattoirs in France is permitted under the Specified Risk Material Regulations 1997 (made under the Food Safety Act 1990) rather than the Specified Risk Material Order 1997 (made under the Animal Health Act 1981). The regulations have been devolved to the Assembly. Unsplit carcasses can be exported to certain specified plants in France following an agreement reached between the United Kingdom and French Governments in late 1998. Therefore, while the Assembly has the statutory power to amend this legislation unilaterally as regards Wales, it could only increase the number of abattoirs allowed to accept whole ewe carcasses with the

agreement of the French authorities. Whether this could be done exclusively for Wales-based producers also raises questions of discrimination against competitors elsewhere in the UK and the possibility that such action might well fall foul of EU state aid rules.

Responsibility for this matter transferred to the Food Standards Agency on 1 April 2000.

Assistance for Dairy Farmers

Nick Bourne: What assistance does Christine Gwyther intend to provide in the next 12 months for dairy farmers in Wales? (WAQ4532)

Christine Gwyther: I will be continuing to assist the dairy industry in Wales in a number of ways. These will include: removing dairy hygiene inspection charges in Wales as soon as possible; ensuring that the agri-monetary compensation to be paid this year to the dairy sector reaches farmers quickly; implementing the agri-food strategy, through development of the dairy prospectus and the dairy action plan, and by awarding grants to suitable dairy processing projects.

GM Crops Trials (Effects on Organic Farming)

Michael German: Will Christine Gwyther make a statement of the possible effects on organic farming in Wales of the three proposed GM crops trials in Gloucestershire? (WAQ4682)

Christine Gwyther: Responsibility for growing the GM crops rests with the farmers themselves and the industry grouping made up of suppliers, growers and producers of GM crops. They are known as SCIMAC—Cynllun Cadwyn Gyflenwi ar Gnydau Amaethyddol Addasedig. They must ensure that the crops are grown and managed in full compliance with current legislative requirements for the GM crops and use of weed killers. These require that the trials follow the SCIMAC code of practice, which ensures segregation and close management of the GM crops throughout. The code also sets out separation distances between GM crops and organic crops to reduce, as far as is practical, the risk of cross-pollination.

All of the crops due to be grown in the evaluations programme have gone through tests in laboratories and on small plots of land. They have been judged not to raise risks to human and animal health. Their direct effect on the surrounding environment has also been assessed and confirmed as safe. No adverse consequences are therefore expected. Carefully controlled and monitored tests of these crops will provide information on whether there are any damaging environmental consequences of growing GM crops under farming conditions.

Questions to the Finance Secretary

Resource Accounting and Budgeting

Glyn Davies: Will the Finance Secretary make a statement on resource accounting and budgeting and how it will effect public expenditure in Wales? (WAQ4030)

Glyn Davies: How will the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting affect the way the Barnett formula is applied? (WAQ4031)

Glyn Davies: What consultations has the Finance Secretary had with the Treasury about the changes that resource accounting and budgeting will have on the Barnett formula, and when will the conclusions be published? (WAQ4033)

The Finance Secretary (Edwina Hart): Resource accounting and budgeting is a new system of planning, controlling and reporting on public spending for government. Under current systems, public

spending is generally planned and controlled in cash terms. Cash payments and receipts score in the financial year they are made or received rather than the year to which the payment relates. It is not a pure cash system because we include some non-cash items in departmental controls, such as credit approvals for local authorities, but generally what counts is cash. At the moment, we treat spending on capital items in the same way as current expenditure. The introduction of resource accounting and budgeting will move central Government to a system of planning, controlling and reporting on public spending to a way that is closer to the commercial world.

The two important differences between the current cash-based system and the resource accounting and budgeting system are:

- i. Capital expenditure. Under resource accounting and budgeting the cost of an asset which lasts for several years will be spread over the life of the asset in the form of an annual depreciation (reduction in value) charge. This, together with an annual cost of capital charge (interest charge) to reflect the opportunity cost of tying up funds in this way, make up the capital charge on departmental assets.
- ii. Current expenditure and income. Under resource accounting and budgeting, expenditure and income will be recorded in the year to which they relate, even if the cash was not received or bills paid that that year. This is known as accruals accounting.

The detailed arrangements for the introduction of resource accounts has been settled for some time and the Assembly, along with Whitehall departments, will publish resource accounts for 1999-2000.

According to the current Treasury timetable, resource budgets will be introduced for 2001-02 onwards following this year's spending review. The Welsh budget will receive an uplift to take account of the new charges being introduced. The proposal is that from then on the Barnett formula will be applied separately to the changes in the resource and capital budgets of comparable English departments' departmental expenditure limits.

A number of aspects of the resource budgeting regime and its implications for the devolved administrations are currently under discussion with the Treasury. Once the detailed arrangements have been settled, the statement of funding policy which sets out the arrangements for the funding of the devolved administrations will be amended and republished.

No decisions have yet been taken about how and when resource budgeting will be introduced in the Assembly and I will make a further statement in due course.

Questions to the Secretary for Post-16 Education and Training

A Levels, BTEC, NVQ/GNVQs, International Baccalaureate

Jonathan Morgan: How many and what proportion of those students who pursue post 16 qualification study A Levels, BTEC courses, NVQ/GNVQs and the International Baccalaureate? (WAQ4652)

The Secretary for Post-16 Education and Training (Tom Middlehurst): There were 203,516 further education students studying at further education institutions in Wales in 1997-98. Information on the qualification aims of these students is given in the table below

Qualification aims, 1997-98 (a)	18 and under	19 and over
A/AS Level	9,270	5,212
NVQ/GNVQ and BTEC	29,901	28,326
Other (b)	41,486	144,167

Post-16 Education

Jonathan Morgan: How many students go on to study post-16 qualification and what proportion of the relevant age group do they constitute? (WAQ4654)

Tom Middlehurst: Information on 16-year-olds who go on to study at school or college is available from the participation information given in Appendix 1 of 'Schools in Wales: General Statistics 1999'. A copy is available from the Library. These tables include all 16-year-old students, whatever they are studying.

In 1997-98, 14,000 16-year-olds (37 per cent) were studying in school while 12,200 (32 per cent) were in full time further or higher education institutions.