

Written Questions answered from 21 to 28 October 1999

[R] signifies the Member has declared an interest.

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Questions to the First Secretary

Cleaning Costs for the Exterior of the New Assembly Building

David Davies: How much will it cost to keep the exterior of the new Assembly building clean and whether provision has been set aside to cover the cost? (WAQ1188VB)

The First Secretary: It has been made clear to the Richard Rogers Partnership in specific terms that an important consideration of the design is the 'ease of maintenance of the external and internal fabric' and that 'value for money is a priority, not just in the initial capital spend but in the on-going through life costs', as specified within the design brief. An estimate of running costs will be made once the detailed design of the building has been finalised.

Brymbo Land Reclamation Scheme

Karen Sinclair: Has there been any further progress made within the Welsh Development Agency with regard to the land reclamation scheme for Brymbo? (WAQ1483VB)

The First Secretary: The proposed reclamation of the former Brymbo steelworks site has raised a number of difficult technical issues in relation to the level of financial support that the Welsh Development Agency is able to provide to enable the redevelopment scheme proposed by the land owners to proceed. I have visited the site and discussed the scheme with the local authority, the developers and representatives of the local community as well as with you and with Martyn Jones MP. I am urgently considering the options for progressing this scheme and delivery of the necessary level of financial support.

Reducing VAT on Energy Efficient Fuels

Peter Black: Has the First Secretary had any discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer with a view to reducing VAT on energy efficient materials so as facilitate the Assembly's Sustainable Development Scheme? (WAQ1560JS)

The First Secretary: The Chancellor keeps matters of tax policy under review at all times. A reduced VAT rate on energy saving materials under grant schemes for the less well-off was introduced in July 1998. Although I have had no direct discussions with the Chancellor on this matter, I understand the UK Government has already asked the European Commission to consider changes to EU law to allow a reduced rate on energy saving materials in other circumstances. This is something I would support.

Consultation on the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994

John Marek: Will any consultation with the National Assembly for Wales by the UK Government, by reason of Section 5 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, be brought to the attention of Assembly members? (WAQ1561JS)

The First Secretary: The Cabinet Office is currently consulting on proposals to replace Section 5 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 which is about enforcement procedures. The consultation exercise runs until 26 November and copies of the consultation documents (in English and Welsh) have been placed in the Assembly Library. Copies of the consultation document have been distributed widely including to local authorities and other relevant organisations in Wales. The key proposal would entail repealing Section 5 of the Act and replacing it with a statutory code of good enforcement practice (the current code of practice is a

voluntary one). The position in Wales is covered in paragraph 29 of the consultation paper. This explains that although the relevant powers under the Act have not been transferred to the Assembly, the Government would propose to consult the Assembly in advance if the new power were to be used in any way that affected Welsh interests.

Welsh Representation in UKREP

Nick Bourne: What measures is the First Secretary taking to ensure Welsh representation in UKREP? (WAQ1597VB)

The First Secretary: You will recall that this was given consideration by the European Committee on 14 October, and I said there that we will discuss the issue of representation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and with UKREP. A report will go to the Committee in due course.

The First Secretary's Official Engagements (26 October)

John Marek: Will the First Secretary list his official engagements for Tuesday 26 October? (WAQ1623JS)

The First Secretary: I had a number of meetings scheduled at the Assembly during the day and in the evening I attended a colloquium on urban regeneration involving participants from the UK and America.

Questions to the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development

Cull Ewe Scheme for Wales

Nick Bourne: Does the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development intend to introduce a cull ewe scheme in Wales? (WAQ954VB)

The Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development (Christine Gwyther): The Scottish Executive proposed a cull ewe scheme for Scotland, but in the light of the difficulties raised by the European Commission decided that there was no scope for pursuing the matter. I can see no scope for securing Commission agreement to a cull ewe scheme for Wales.

Beef on the Bone Ban

Glyn Davies: Will a decision by the Agriculture Minister at Westminster to lift the beef on the bone ban automatically apply in Wales? (WAQ1064JS)

Christine Gwyther: No. Only if a majority of Assembly Members vote to lift the ban on the sale of beef on the bone can the ban, which was implemented under legislation that is now devolved to the Assembly, be lifted.

Lifting of the Beef on the Bone Ban in England

Glyn Davies: What will be the procedure in Wales to consider the beef on the bone ban if the Agriculture Minister in Westminster decides to lift the ban in England? (WAQ1065JS)

Glyn Davies: Will Christine Gwyther continue to oppose a lifting of the beef on the bone ban in Wales if the Agriculture Minister at Westminster decides to lift the ban in England? (WAQ1085JS)

Christine Gwyther: The First Secretary and I are eager for the ban to be lifted as soon as possible. However, we will continue to be guided by the advice of the Assembly's Chief Medical Officer, which is that, on the basis of the evidence currently available, the risk to human health does not yet justify lifting the ban. The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee agreed on 21 September to reconsider all the available information including the advice of all Chief Medical Officer's. This is a devolved matter and the ban will only be lifted in Wales if the Assembly so decides.

Competition Commission Report on Raw Milk Sales

Glyn Davies: Will the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development be making a written statement on behalf of the Assembly Cabinet to the House of Commons Select Committee looking into the implications of the Competition Commission report on raw milk sales and will she publish any such submission? (WAQ1086JS)

Glyn Davies: What further steps is Christine Gwyther taking to oppose the policy of Stephen Byers in respect of the Competition Commission's report into raw milk sales. (WAQ1088JS)

Christine Gwyther: Yes. I have already submitted a memorandum to the House of Commons Agriculture Select Committee, which will be published in due course.

Cattle Passports

Nick Bourne: Does Christine Gwyther intend to enter into discussions on the unacceptability of cattle passports being placed on the agriculture industry in Wales? (WAQ1011VB)

Christine Gwyther: I welcome the announcement by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 20 September that, as part of a support package for the farming industry, the Government will not impose charges for cattle passports before 2002-2003 at the earliest.

European Commission Regulations on the Butchering of Meat

Nick Bourne: Does the Assembly have devolved power in relation to EC regulations relating to the butchering of meat, where the person butchering does not own the meat? (WAQ1227VB).

Christine Gwyther: Yes. Power to legislate in relation to the slaughter and preparation of meat has been devolved to the Assembly. In exercising these powers, the Assembly must ensure that the requirements of the relevant EC regulations are fully implemented.

The Pratt Report

David Davies: Will Christine Gwyther inform the Assembly as soon as she is advised of any plans to publish the Pratt Report in Wales? (WAQ1230JS)

David Davies: Does Christine Gwyther have any plans to discuss the Pratt Report when she next meets Nick Brown? (WAQ1229JS)

Christine Gwyther: The Pratt report was commissioned by the Meat and Livestock Commission and published by them on Tuesday 21 September. As announced by Nick Brown on 20 September, the Government is to conduct an efficiency review of the operation of the Meat Hygiene Service to run in parallel with the joint review of regulatory burdens. The MLC report will provide a valuable background document to that exercise.

Promotion of Farm Tourism

Nick Bourne: What measures is the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development taking to promote farm tourism? (WAQ1330JS)

Christine Gwyther: We are all acutely aware of the problems facing the farming industry in Wales and the need for Welsh agriculture to adapt. Agri-tourism and farm diversification are important parts of the Assembly's strategy for securing a viable long term future for Welsh farmers.

The Farm Development Strategy Group, chaired by Fred Cunningham, the Principal of Llysfasi College, has been set up specifically to help Welsh agriculture adapt and diversify. This all-Wales steering group will assist farmers to adopt best practice and environmentally friendly production techniques; to gain the skills to manage their farms as businesses; to diversify, and to take informed decisions about their future and those of their families.

In terms of agri-tourism, over £1 million of Rural Development Grant (RDG) has been awarded to help match fund European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund Objective 5b agri-tourism projects since the scheme was introduced in 1997. One of the most notable awards is that of £360,000 to the Wales Tourist Board to co-finance a three-year project to provide a co-ordinated all-Wales approach to farm tourism. The project will give financial assistance towards the improvement of farm tourism accommodation and attractions backed by business and environmental advice. Another excellent project is the recently announced 'Essence of Montgomeryshire' scheme which has been put together by Montgomeryshire Farm Enterprise, a farmer run co-operative. This project has received £275,640 of RDG to undertake a range of agri-tourism developments which will have benefits not only for the farmers taking part, but also others in the area who will be able to draw on their knowledge and expertise.

SCIMAC Voluntary Code of Practice

Michael German: Is the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development satisfied that the Government endorsed Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops (SCIMAC) voluntary code of practice for GM crops is adequate to prevent the contamination of neighbouring crops and thus eliminate any risk of damage to the wider environment, and, if not, what steps will she take to ensure that adequate controls are introduced? (WAQ1368AG)

Christine Gwyther: The SCIMAC code of practice is one of the factors considered by the Advisory Committee for Release to the Environment when setting authorisation conditions such as separation distances for the crop trials. Information from decades of experience in producing seeds to specific purity levels is used to estimate the level of cross-pollination that is likely to occur between crops. This is an area the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee may wish to look at following its consideration of the Assembly's powers planned for later this year.

Assembly Powers to Halt or Suspend GM Crop Trials

Michael German: Will the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development clarify what powers the Assembly has to suspend or halt GM crop trials, both in Wales and in the rest of the UK, which are regarded as being harmful to the environment or to ecological systems within Wales, and can she detail the time-scale involved in doing so? (WAQ1369AG)

Christine Gwyther: A GM crop trial in Wales would require consent under Section 111 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to be given by the Assembly and the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. The Act also contains provisions that allow the granting authority to revoke

the consent or vary its terms. These provisions would be used where justified by further evidence.

Interference to Ecological Systems from Trials of GM Crops

Michael German: Will the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development place upon the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) the duty to inform the Assembly of the interference to ecological systems within Wales it regards as being possible from trials of GM crops being undertaken within the UK? (WAQ1370AG)

Christine Gwyther: ACRE's advice is based on an assessment of the risks to the whole of the UK. A consent would not be granted if there was any reason to suspect a significant risk to the environment in Wales, or anywhere else in the UK.

Consultations with MAFF on GM Crop Trials

Michael German: Are regular consultations being undertaken with MAFF to ascertain whether present or future GM crop trials in England will prove hazardous to ecological systems in Wales? (WAQ1371AG)

Christine Gwyther: Assessment of risk to the environment forms a key part of the GM regulatory process. Authorisation would not be given if MAFF considered there to be a significant risk to ecological systems in Wales or elsewhere.

Control Test Sites in Wales (Krebs Report)

Brian Gibbons: Following the Krebs Report on bovine TB and badger cull strategy, is the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development aware if any of the proactive, reactive or control test sites are located in Wales? (WAQ1536VB)

Christine Gwyther: There are no trial areas in Wales nor are there any plans to have any at this time. I will be having a discussion with the chair of the Independent Scientific Group about bovine TB and the work that is being carried out. Incidence of bovine TB is increasing in Wales and we need to understand the underlying causes if we are to put in place a sustainable policy of dealing with the disease.

Proposed Egg Production Unit, Porthcawl

Alun Cairns: What representation has Christine Gwyther received in relation to the proposed egg production unit at Sea View Farm, Porthcawl? (WAQ1537VB) *Transferred for written answer by the Secretary for the Environment and Local Government.*

The Secretary for the Environment and Local Government (Peter Law): In August, the South Cornelly Residents' Association asked local people who objected to the proposed development to write to me and Christine Gwyther. Those letters were interpreted as requests that the Assembly should call in the planning application rather than leaving it to the local planning authority, Bridgend County Borough Council. A total of 71 letters of objection have been received. A decision about whether to call it in will be made shortly.

French and German Ban on British Beef

Nick Bourne: What discussions is the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development having with her counterpart in Westminster regarding the harmful effect of the ban on British beef on

the part of France and Germany, and is she will publish details of her discussions?
(WAQ1572VB)

Christine Gwyther: I wholeheartedly support the actions being taken by the Prime Minister and Nick Brown in relation to the French and German ban on British beef. We have made it very clear how important it is to Welsh farmers that the Commission decision on beef exports is implemented in full. Assembly officials are in close contact with their colleagues in MAFF about this matter and we have been kept fully up to date with developments.

Organic Aid Scheme Forms

Nick Bourne: Why was there a delay in making the forms available in October for the organic aid scheme? (WAQ1591VB)

Christine Gwyther: There was no delay. Application packs have been available from divisional offices since 1 October, the date the scheme opened. We have also sent packs through the post to all those farmers who had previously expressed an interest in the scheme.

The Banning of Country Sports in Wales

Nick Bourne: Will Christine Gwyther make a statement of what representations she has received regarding the potential banning of country sports in Wales and will publish those representations? (WAQ1592VB)

Christine Gwyther: Representations have been received both for and against the Government's intention to introduce proposals to ban hunting with dogs. To respect the privacy of those who make their views known, it is not our policy to publish the representations received except where representations are received as part of a formal consultation in which respondents have been warned about the likelihood of publication.

Progress on Lifting the Ban on Beef on the Bone

Nick Bourne: What progress is being made to lifting the ban on beef on the bone in Wales, and will Christine Gwyther publish details of discussion she has had with her Westminster counterpart on this issue? (WAQ1593VB)

Christine Gwyther: The First Secretary and I will continue to be guided by the advice of the Assembly's Chief Medical Officer on this matter. That advice is that, on the basis of evidence currently available, the risk to human health does not yet justify lifting the ban. We are eager for the ban on the sale of beef on the bone to be lifted and hope that that will be soon. The First Secretary and I continue to keep close contact with our counterparts in other Government departments.

Questions to the Finance Secretary

Private Sector Consultancy

Peter Black: Will the Finance Secretary give a breakdown of the £298,000 spent by the Arts Council of Wales in 1998/99 on private sector consultancy? (WAQ1444JS)

The Finance Secretary (Edwina Hart): This is an operational matter for the Arts Council of Wales. I have asked the Chief Executive to send you a full reply. I will place a copy in the Library.

Pierhead Building Market Value

David Davies: What is the current market value of the Pierhead Building? (WAQ1467VB)

Edwina Hart: The National Assembly for Wales has made no assessment of the current market value of the Pierhead Building.

Paper Recycling

Peter Black: What proportion of the Assembly's paper stock is recycled? (WAQ1570VB)

Edwina Hart: At the present time we cannot make a confident forecast of the proportion of the paper stock that will be recycled. The Assembly's total paper usage is not known and is difficult to predict because there has been an increase in the number of people using paper, including Members, their support staff and additional officials, and the pattern and nature of work is still evolving.

In 1998-99 the Welsh Office recycled in excess of 80,000 kg of waste paper; to put this in context, approximately 120,000 kg of white paper were purchased during that year. Paper recycling has since been extended to the Assembly building, and it is our aim to recycle as much paper as possible. Furthermore the Assembly aims to extend and improve existing recycling schemes, and to look for new opportunities for recycling where possible. Staff have a fundamental part to play in helping the Assembly reduce the amount of waste it sends to landfill and are regularly encouraged to use recycling facilities.

Increasing the Use of Recycled Paper

Peter Black: What action is being taken to increase the amount of recycled paper being used by the National Assembly for Wales? (WAQ1571VB)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly's policy is to use recycled paper containing genuine post-consumer waste wherever possible. The target is for all non-specialist paper to contain at least 75 per cent post-consumer waste by 31 March 2000. This is already reflected in the Assembly's contracts for the supply of non-specialist paper, which account for the vast majority of paper bought in.

Questions to the Secretary for Health and Social Services

Reduction of Waiting Times for Hearing Aid Tests

Carwyn Jones: What plans does the Secretary for Health and Social Services have to reduce waiting times for hearing aid tests in Wales? (WAQ922VB)

The Secretary for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): Since coming into office, the Government has invested over £37 million to reduce waiting lists and to encourage innovation in the management of lists. It is up to each health authority, in discussion with their NHS Trusts, to decide how this money should be used and what priority should be given to individual services.

Expenditure for Consultants

David Davies: How much money is the Secretary for Health and Social Services' department spending on consultants and would she list the consultants being used and specify the reason for each consultant being used? (WAQ1192VB)

Jane Hutt: Expenditure incurred in the current financial year on external consultants in the areas for which I am responsible is expected to amount to £371,000. Details of these consultancies are as follows:

Consultant Appointed	Reason for Consultancy
Secta Limited	To furnish advice to enable the National Assembly for Wales to agree the arrangements concerning the possible merger of NHS Trusts in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.
Not yet appointed	To inspect medical equipment employing radiation and the recommendation of staff procedures to abide by new European legislation.
Professor P Routledge	To furnish professional advice on toxicology to the Chief Medical Officer for Wales.
Not yet appointed	To furnish advice on child protection problems, including their detection and management by health visitors and school nurses.
Hay Management Consultants	To undertake a review of the National Health Directorate.
Not yet appointed	In connection with the funding of an optometric adviser.
Not yet appointed	To perform a feasibility study into the development of an executive management information system for social services in Wales.
Kings College London	To furnish advice to the National Assembly for Wales regarding the future of the grant scheme and funding strategy for social care voluntary sector organisations.
Not yet appointed	To undertake a review of playgroups in Wales.
WS Atkins	To undertake a review of core funding of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action.
University of Glamorgan, Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care	To undertake a review of the Arbutnot Report recommendations for changes to Scottish resource allocation formula and

	consideration of its applicability to Wales.
Not yet appointed	To benchmark human resource services in the National Health Service in Wales.
Not yet appointed	To ensure that safeguards and standards of care for young patients accommodated in residential mental health units in Wales are in accordance with the standards laid down in National Assembly for Wales policy documents.

Reduction of Waiting Times for a Hearing Test

Peter Black: What plans does Jane Hutt have to reduce waiting times for a hearing test to no more than a month and to a further month for a hearing aid to be fitted? (WAQ1342VB)

Jane Hutt: Data on patients waiting for individual procedures, including hearing tests, are included within the aggregate lists for the relevant speciality (ear, nose and throat in this case) and are not separately collected by the National Assembly for Wales.

We have invested over £37 million to reduce waiting lists and to encourage innovation in the management of lists. An additional £19 million has been made available recurrently from 1999-2000. This is part of a discretionary cash increase of £148 million to health authorities this year, which is 10.5 per cent more than 1998-1999.

The Health and Social Services Committee have approved a strategy that should include:

- the inclusive engagement of all stakeholders with a contribution to make, including primary care practitioners, the secondary and tertiary sector, local authorities and patient representative groups.
- a medium-term approach focused on agreed targets and backed by targeted investment and firmer management of key issues;
- a move away from waiting lists as the measure of performance to a performance framework focused on waiting times. In addition to responding to patients' true priority, it would address clinicians concerns that waiting list management should also reflect the clinical priority accorded to patients;
- agreed targets at national, health authority, trust and specialty levels;
- action and investment to separate elective and emergency activity;
- the development of improved management techniques including booked admission systems, waiting list prioritisation, pooled waiting lists, extended day case procedures, real-time reporting of waiting times and the review of the conclusions and recommendations of the Clinical Standards Advisory Group's report; and
- a review of the information routinely available to inform management processes at each level.

Total Extra Cost of the 10 Over Budget Schemes

Brian Gibbons: Further to WAQ920VB, what was the total extra cost incurred by the 10 schemes which were over budget and what proportion of the original costs does this represent? (WAQ1433VB)

Jane Hutt: The total extra cost incurred by the 10 schemes was £7.72 million. This represented an overall increase of 8.5 per cent on the approved costs in the Full Business Cases. As I explained in my reply to WAQ920VB, scheme costs can and do increase legitimately for a number of reasons. However, any request to uplift the approved sum must be supported by a thorough and comprehensive business case with approval resting with the Finance Sub-Committee of the NHS Directorate Executive Committee.

Completion of 14 Projects not Completed Within the Original Timetable

Brian Gibbons: Further to WAQ920VB, how many of the 14 projects which were out of time were completed within nine months of the specified target date? (WAQ1434VB)

Jane Hutt: All of the 14 projects that were not completed within the original timetable were completed within nine months of the target date. As I explained in my reply to WAQ920VB, contracts for major capital schemes always include provisions for time extensions to be agreed between the architect and contractors and it is not unusual for the original contract date to be exceeded.

Access to the Best Quality Hearing Devices

Kirsty Williams: What plans does Jane Hutt have to ensure that deaf people in Wales have speedy access to the best quality hearing devices on the market? (WAQ1538VB)

Jane Hutt: I referred to my intentions for improving hearing aid technology in my reply to Peter Black AM on 4 October (WAQ1341VB). Following a report made by a NHS Executive led review group (including representatives from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland), a number of pilot schemes have been set up in England to test the feasibility of some of the options recommended. The review group has looked at the various options of delivering hearing aid services and improving the range and technology of hearing aids available. I will be looking with interest at their conclusions to see if they are suitable to introduce into the NHS in Wales.

Independent Visitor Scheme ('Looked After' Children)

Brian Gibbons: Which local authorities in Wales offer an independent visitor scheme for 'looked after' children and how many such visitors have been appointed and what proportion of children have been offered the option of having an independent visitor? (WAQ1559JS)

Jane Hutt: The information requested is not held centrally.

Extra Resources for Primary Care

David Melding: Would Jane Hutt make a statement regarding the appropriate use by health authorities of the recent £4 million uplift for primary care in Wales, and in particular state if and how these extra resources should be concentrated on areas within health authority boundaries that suffer from high levels of social exclusion and if it is the administrations priority that these

additional primary care resources be used for connecting all GPs to NHS Cymru Net? (WAQ1573VB)

Jane Hutt: The additional £4 million which was made available to health authorities from 1 April 1999 demonstrates our commitment to developing primary care in Wales. The funding is earmarked for supporting general medical practice infrastructure costs in Wales. It is subject to the normal rules and guidelines for this expenditure, which is set out in the Statement of Fees and Allowances for General Medical Practitioners. This means that it can be used only to support practice staff costs, practice premises development, IMT investment, and certain expenses incurred in delivering general medical services out of hours.

Health authorities have discretion on how they earmark the funds within their area according to local needs and priorities and subject only to the provisions of the 'Statement of Fees and Allowances' and to consultation with their local health groups and local medical committees.

One major domain of activity outlined in Better Information–Better Health (Health Information Management and Technology Division's Strategic Framework 1998-2005) is 'Developing the Infrastructure to Capture, Access, Analyse and Share Health Information.' This will provide the ability to communicate and share documents, messages and images easily with other colleagues, across healthcare sectors, regardless of location. It is within this context that options for connecting GPs to the Digital All Wales [telecommunications] Network (DAWN) have been reviewed by Assembly officials working corporately with NHS representatives. Such connections will enable access to a basic level of services including e-mail, web browsing (NHS Intranet Cymruweb and Internet) and standard office applications.

A study of all aspects of connectivity for the NHS in Wales has recently been commissioned. This embraces all sectors and sites, including the requirements of independent contractors and links with higher education. It is intended that implementation of this strategic approach will commence in 2001.

Withdrawal of Night time Ambulance Services (Powys)

Nick Bourne: Will Jane Hutt publish representations she has received about the withdrawal of night time ambulance services in Crickhowell, Bronllys and Builth Wells, Powys? (WAQ1586VB)

Jane Hutt: I have no plans to publish the eight representations I have received about the cessation of standby night time cover from the ambulance stations at Crickhowell, Bronllys and Builth Wells. I have reassured the correspondents that, by increasing the hours of cover in ambulance stations in surrounding areas, overall performance standards should not diminish for their areas and should improve for the whole of Powys.

Support for People with Disabilities Grant Scheme

Kirsty Williams: Will Jane Hutt outline the Assembly's plan for the Support for People with Disabilities grant scheme which is due to end on 31 March 2000? (WAQ1595VB)

Jane Hutt: The grant scheme arrangements to apply after 31 March 2000 will be determined in the light of the outcome of the Assembly's budget planning round.

Questions to the Secretary for the Environment and Local Government

Open-cast Mining

Nick Bourne: Will the Secretary for the Environment and Local Government make a statement regarding the Government of Wales's policy in relation to open-cast mining in the upper Swansea valley and the Brecon Beacons National Park? (WAQ1326JS)

The Secretary for the Environment and Local Government (Peter Law): Responsibility for determining planning applications for open-cast mining in these areas rests essentially with the local planning authorities concerned. The Assembly is responsible for determining appeals and applications which have been called in. Unless material considerations indicate otherwise, decisions on all applications should accord with policies in local development plans prepared within the policy framework provided in Planning Guidance (Wales) Planning Policy and in minerals planning guidance notes.

Reviewing Community Councils

Brian Hancock: What plans does the Secretary for the Environment and Local Government have to review the way in which community councils are wound up and appointed? (WAQ1420VB)

Peter Law: Any changes to the procedure for establishing or dissolving community councils would require primary legislation and I currently have no plans to review this procedure.

Rail Transport Policy in Wales

Richard Edwards: What progress has the Secretary for the Environment and Local Government made in securing an effective voice for the Assembly in rail transport policy in Wales? (WAQ1432VB)

Peter Law: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is central to the Government's proposals for the railway industry throughout the network, including Wales. The Authority, together with the Rail Regulator, will provide clear, coherent and accountable regulation of the industry, ensuring that the railway is properly integrated with other transport modes. The Deputy Prime Minister has agreed that there will be one member from Wales on the Authority and I shall be consulted on that appointment.

The SRA will consult the Assembly about the exercise of its functions as they relate to the Assembly's interests. I have met Sir Alistair Morton, the Chairman of the shadow Authority, and Mr Michael Grant, the Chief Executive, and have had constructive discussion with them about railways in Wales.

The SRA will be required to consult the Assembly in future franchise negotiations and on all other matters affecting Wales and they are keen to have our views. We fully intend to provide the SRA with strong evidence to support our proposals for improvements to rail services in Wales.

Former Phurnacite Plant in Abercwmboi

Christine Chapman: What assessment has the Secretary for the Environment and Local Government made of the biodiversity of the land and surrounding areas at the former Phurnacite plant in Abercwmboi? (WAQ1505JS)

Peter Law: In my answer to your earlier question on 30 June (OAQ264VB), I indicated that the Welsh Development Agency was waiting for a decision from Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council on its planning application for the reclamation of the former Phurnacite plant site at Abercwmboi. I understand that the Council subsequently resolved to defer consideration of the application for further public consultation.

As for the assessment of the biodiversity of the site and surrounding area, the WDA appointed landscape/ecology consultants as an integral part of the reclamation project design team. They prepared an appraisal of the site prior to submission of the planning application in January 1995. The Environmental Statement, prepared in January 1995, also took account of these issues.

The Welsh Advisory Group on Transport

Peter Black: What plans does the Secretary for the Environment and Local Government have to re-constitute the Welsh Transport Advisory Group? (WAQ1563VB)

Peter Law: I shall present a proposal for a successor body to the Welsh Transport Advisory Group as part of the paper on an integrated transport strategy which will be discussed at the Environment and Local Government Committee meeting on 10 November 1999.

Transport Links Between North and South Wales

Peter Black: What consideration has been given to establishing a Traws Cymru bus route providing convenient and fast links between north and south Wales? (WAQ1567VB)

Peter Law: A daily service is provided by Arriva Cymru between Cardiff and Holyhead through the Traws Cambria service, departing from Cardiff at 8.55 a.m. and arriving in Holyhead at 5.50 p.m. The return service departs from Holyhead at 8.45 a.m. and arrives in Cardiff at 5.40 p.m.

The Babtie Group Limited consultants are undertaking a study examining the existing and potential travel demands for all types of transport between north and south Wales. This work will contribute valuable data to help me ensure the strategic development of public transport between north and south Wales. The results will be used to inform decisions on the scale and priorities for future investment to improve transport links in Wales. It is anticipated that the consultants' report will be completed by March 2000.

Reconstruction of Freemans Way, Haverfordwest (Consultation)

Nick Bourne: What consultation was made with the local authority and local residents regarding the reconstruction of Freemans Way, Haverfordwest? (WAQ1588VB)

Peter Law: Pembrokeshire County Council, who are preparing the scheme on behalf of the West Wales Trunk Road Agency, consulted Haverfordwest Town Council, Merlins Bridge Community Council, the emergency services and local county councillors, on 16 September

1999. The consultation letter gave details of the proposed reconstruction work. Pembrokeshire also took the opportunity to ask for comments on their proposal to provide a new access to the County Hall site from a remodelled Salutation Square roundabout.

We have since been told that Pembrokeshire do not now intend to provide a new access, and so no work to remodel the roundabout will be necessary.

The contract to carry out the work will be awarded shortly and people and businesses affected by the work will be given at least 2 weeks' notice of the start of work, as is common practice with such maintenance schemes.

Use For Former Cwrt-y-Gollen Training Camp

Nick Bourne: Ha there been any progress in finding a use for the former Cwrt-y-Gollen training camp on the outskirts of Crickhowell, Powys? (WAQ1590VB)

Peter Law: As the First Secretary explained in his reply on 26 May, this is a matter for the Ministry of Defence and any prospective purchasers. I understand that the Cwrt-y-Gollen working party met on 29 September and received a verbal report on the options of community use for the camp from Powys County Council's consultants.

Questions to the Secretary for Economic Development

Consultants to the Secretary for Economic Development's department

David Davies: How much money is the Secretary for Economic Development's department spending on consultants and will he list the consultants being used and specify the reason for each consultant being used? (WAQ1208JS)

The Secretary for Economic Development (Rhodri Morgan): Expenditure incurred in the current financial year on external consultants in the areas for which I am responsible is expected to amount to £115,000. Details of these consultancies are as follows:

Consultant Appointed	Reason for Consultancy
University of Reading	To undertake an evaluation of the effects of agricultural policy, in particular Agenda 2000, on the wider economy.
ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited	To provide a labour market assessment for Objective 1 and 3 programme documents.
ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited	To undertake an ex-ante evaluation of Objective 3 operational programme.
ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited	To undertake an ex-ante evaluation of objective 2 single programming document.
Environmental Resources Management Limited	To undertake a study on environmental performance indicators for objective 1 programme documents.
University of Wales, Bangor	To undertake an ex-ante evaluation of Objective 1 and 3 programme documents.
ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited	To undertake an ex-ante evaluation of the Objective 1 single programme document.
Not yet appointed	To furnish advice and guidance regarding the

	Rural Development Plan.
TACP	To undertake an evaluation of the Groundwork movement in Wales.

The Most Deprived Wards in Wales

Geraint Davies: Will the Secretary for Economic Development supply the most recent figures/tables of the most deprived wards in Wales? (WAQ1438VB)

Rhodri Morgan: A joint project group of the Assembly and the Welsh Local Government Association has let a contract to Oxford University to develop a new ward-level index of deprivation for Wales. The work will be completed in the new year and made available to Assembly Members. This index will replace the Welsh Office's index of socio-economic conditions which was largely based on 1991 census data and last updated in 1993. A copy of the ward index of socio-economic conditions is available in the library.

In addition, the statistical report 'Mapping social exclusion in Wales' was presented to the Assembly in June 1999 and copies are also available in the library.

Developing an Energy Policy for Wales

Peter Black: What progress has been made in developing an energy policy for Wales? (WAQ1565VB)

Rhodri Morgan: Energy policy is not a devolved matter. However, in conjunction with my officials, I am currently considering the best way to develop a strategic framework for energy developments in Wales within the context of Objective 1 assistance covering the years 2000-06 and the Assembly's overarching commitment to sustainable development. I will be seeking views from the Economic Development Committee in due course.

Pembrokeshire Postal Addresses

Nick Bourne: Has the Secretary for Economic Development been involved in any discussions with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and/or representatives of the Royal Mail regarding postal addresses in the former Dyfed, now Pembrokeshire? (WAQ1568VB)

Rhodri Morgan: I have not been involved in any discussions with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding postal addresses. Designation of postal addresses (and allocation of postcodes) is the operational responsibility of the Post Office.

Regional Selective Assistance Paid in Wales

Alun Cairns: What are the amounts of regional selective assistance that have been paid in Wales over the last 10 years project by project or at the lowest level that can be made available to the public without breaching commercial confidentiality? (WAQ1574VB)

Rhodri Morgan: Total payments of Regional Selective Assistance over the last 10 years are as follows:

Year	Regional Selective Assistance Payments (£m)
1989-90	34.9
1990-91	30.2

1991-92	55.1
1992-93	58.7
1993-94	50.8
1994-95	56.9
1995-96	54.2
1996-97	47.8
1997-98	75.7
1998-99	79.9

The information on individual payments is not available in the form requested, project by project, for reasons of commercial confidentiality. Information is available on individual grants of £75,000 or more where an initial payment of grant has been made. This is published in *Labour Market Trends* (formerly the *Employment Gazette*) in the quarter following the payment. The published details give the name of the grant recipient, the travel to work area location of the project, the value of the grant offered, the project type ('A' – mainly new jobs, or 'B' – mainly safeguarded jobs) and the standard industrial classification. Copies are held in the Assembly Library. Details of the information published in the last 10 years will be sent to you separately, and a copy will be placed in the library.

Economic Development in Wrexham

Karen Sinclair: What assessment has been made of the possible problems that could be encountered in my constituency and Wrexham, vis-à-vis economic development, (as Wrexham is the main 'travel to work' area) given the geographical proximity of both north-west Wales and Liverpool? (WAQ1575AG)

Rhodri Morgan: The UK Government has sent a draft assisted areas map to the European Commission's competition Directorate (Directorate General IV). In addition to west Wales and the Valleys, which qualifies for assistance under derogation 87(3)(a) of the Treaty, important parts of north east Wales have been put forward for assistance under derogation 87(3)(c). The draft map awaits the approval of the Commission. The draft map seeks to cover both need and opportunity for development.

Our policy is to promote prosperity throughout the whole of Wales—north and south, east and west. The proposed new assisted areas map, with our achievement of European structural funding, represents a major boost for the Welsh economy.

It is vital that we are able to put appropriate business support in place. Regional selective assistance has been the main form of business support in the assisted areas. We now have the chance to develop a broader range of support to large and small firms and we have been consulting with business, local government and academics to develop proposals for enhancing business support programmes across Wales.

For those areas of north east Wales which are currently Objective 2 or 5b and are not being proposed for Objective 2, transitional assistance will be available on a reducing basis through to 2005.

Objective 3 assistance to specific human resource projects will be available in all areas not covered by Objective 1.

Small and medium sized enterprises with fewer than 250 employees will continue to qualify for other financial incentives in the areas excluded from full or intermediate development area status from the year 2000 onwards.

Brecon Distillery

Nick Bourne: What Welsh Development Agency assistance has been made available to the Brecon Distillery in the past, and what grants are to be made available in the future? (WAQ1577VB)

Rhodri Morgan: The Brecon Distillery was operated for a number of years by the Welsh Whisky Company Limited which later changed its name to Welsh Distillers Limited. The only assistance offered to it by the WDA was a £10,000 small business loan in 1993. In the same year the Wales Tourist Board offered it a grant of £25,000. In 1995 the Development Board for Rural Wales offered the company a Mid Wales Development Grant of £87,500, of which £58,000 was paid.

In 1998 Welsh Distillers Limited went into voluntary liquidation and some of the assets have been acquired by a newly formed company, which has taken the name Welsh Whisky Company Limited. Fresh grants would be considered against the standard criteria and the requirements of commercial confidentiality until being reported in the usual way.

Post Office Closures

Nick Bourne: Will Rhodri Morgan publish a list of post offices that have closed in Wales since 1 May 1999? (WAQ1578VB)

Rhodri Morgan: This is an operational matter for the Post Office and the answer can be obtained direct by writing to John Roberts, Chief Executive of the Post Office, Room 123, 148 Old Street, London EC1V 9HQ.

Assembly Backing for the Opening of the Welsh European Centre 2000

Nick Bourne: What proposals does Rhodri Morgan have to ensure Assembly backing for the opening of the Welsh European Centre's new premises in 2000? (WAQ1596VB)

Rhodri Morgan: As you will recall, this was discussed in the Assembly's European Committee recently. The new premises will help to focus interest on Wales in Brussels and the assembly's participation in the Wales European Centre will be pursued as described to the committee.

Welsh Week in Europe (March 2001)

Nick Bourne: What proposals does Rhodri Morgan have to take advantage of a Welsh week in Europe in March 2001? (WAQ1598VB)

Rhodri Morgan: This matter was discussed with the assembly's European Committee last week. Consideration is being given to the planning of such a week in 2001 and I will want to take part myself and to make sure that the assembly as a whole is involved if the event goes ahead. Options will be considered with a view to take maximum advantage for Wales as a whole.

Questions to the Secretary for Education and Children

External Assessors of Performance Related Pay (Responsibility)

Jonathan Morgan: To whom will the external assessors, involved in the administration of performance related pay in Wales, be responsible? (WAQ1422VB)

The Secretary for Education and Children (Rosemary Butler): The external assessors' role is to check the head's assessments of teachers' applications for the performance threshold against national standards. Assessors will be nationally trained and accredited professionals with relevant experience and they will be managed by an organisation operating under contract with the National Assembly for Wales, which in conjunction with the Department for Education and Employment will act as a national provider of assessors.

External Assessors of Performance Related Pay (Powers)

Jonathan Morgan: What powers the external assessors will have during the appraisal of teachers in Wales under the proposed performance related pay scheme? (WAQ1423VB)

Rosemary Butler: The external assessors' role relates to the performance threshold. This will be a school-based process with a teacher making an application which the head will assess in light of observations by the line manager, if appropriate. The head's assessments will be checked against national standards by a trained external assessor.

If in the opinion of the assessor further work is needed on the school's approach to the assessment process or the decisions taken on the applications themselves, the assessor will arrange a second visit. If there is a disagreement between the head and the assessor on the applications the assessor will work with the head to resolve their differences. If this is not possible, even after a second visit, the assessor will make the final decision on whether or not applicants are successful.

Support for Voluntary Controlled Schools

Jonathan Morgan: What support will be offered to voluntary controlled schools who wish to become voluntary aided schools? (WAQ1424VB)

Rosemary Butler: Under the Education (Change of Category of Maintained Schools) (Wales) Regulations 1999 a voluntary controlled school is not able to publish statutory proposals to change its category until 1 September 2000.

Voluntary controlled schools wishing to become voluntary aided schools would need to demonstrate that they had the support of the relevant church authority and could meet the additional obligations placed on a voluntary aided school governing body in respect of employment of staff and capital investment. As voluntary aided schools, they would be eligible for capital grants from the Assembly to meet 85 per cent of the governors' liabilities, would have to meet 15 per cent of their costs and would need the support of the local education authority for its element of costs.

Support for Governors of Voluntary Aided Schools (Performance Related Pay Appraisal)

Jonathan Morgan: What level of support will be given to governors of voluntary aided schools in Wales who will be involved in the appraisal of teachers under the proposed performance related pay scheme? (WAQ1425VB)

Rosemary Butler: Governing bodies will need to agree their school's performance management policy and ensure it is operating effectively, but they will not have a role in gathering evidence or making judgements about individual teachers. Governing bodies have a responsibility for agreeing objectives with heads and deputies as a basis for performance review and pay review, and will need to carry out this process during autumn 1999. Guidance on the new heads' pay scale and on objective setting will be sent to governing bodies shortly. From September 2000, the support of a trained external adviser will be available.

Improvement of School Buildings (Existing Budgets)

Jonathan Morgan: Will existing maintenance budgets for schools be able to meet the Government's expectations for improving school buildings? (WAQ1426VB)

Rosemary Butler: The Welsh Local Government Association estimate that the backlog of maintenance for school buildings is of the order of £325 million of which around a half would fall on revenue budgets. I am concerned that authorities should give more priority to maintenance of school buildings. The planned increases for education in the local government revenue settlements for 2000-01 and 2001-02 of £75 million and £80 million respectively, should assist authorities.

Improvement of school buildings is also supported by capital budgets. Local authorities have available basic credit approvals. The notional share for education for 1999-2000 is £42.939m. Planned provision for 2000-01 and 2001-02 is £44.439 million and £54.939 million respectively. In addition, we are providing £65 million to improve school buildings under the New Deal: Additional Capital Funding for Schools programme over the period 1997-87 to 2001-02. I announced allocations of £13.276 million for 1999-2000 in July.

Final decisions on local government revenue and capital provision for 2000-01 and 2001-02 are for the Assembly.

Budgeting Differentials Between Local Education Authorities

Jonathan Morgan: Does Rosemary Butler have any plans to combat budgeting differentials between local education authorities? (WAQ1427VB)

Rosemary Butler: Levels of funding for education and schools are a matter for individual local authorities. They should have regard to the needs of their areas to ensure that the education service is properly funded.

Performance Related Pay Performance Criteria (Support for Teachers)

Jonathan Morgan: What support will be available to teachers in Wales who do not meet the performance criteria as set under the proposed performance related pay scheme? (WAQ1428VB)

Rosemary Butler: The performance management process will set a framework for teachers and their team leaders to agree and review priorities and objectives. Schools' decisions on post-threshold pay points on the proposed new upper pay spine will be informed by the outcomes of performance review.

Teachers have the right to expect that their performance will be regularly assessed and that they will have a proper opportunity for professional discussion with their team leader about their work and their professional development. Part of this review process should be to identify areas for development and how these needs will be met.

The performance threshold is the way teachers will be able to gain access to the proposed new upper pay spine. It will take the form of an assessment against national standards drawn up to identify effective teaching. A guidance pack for heads, team leaders, and candidates will be published. There will be an annual round of applications and previously unsuccessful teachers will be able to reapply.

Christian Education Movement in Wales (Financial Assistance)

Gareth Jones: What plans does the Secretary for Education and Children have to provide financial assistance to the Christian Education Movement in Wales? (WAQ1435VB)

Rosemary Butler: Resources have been made available to LEAs in Wales under the grants for education support and training (GEST) programme in 1999-2000 to provide training and support measures to assist with the implementation and development of religious education and collective worship in schools. LEAs and schools can purchase training using their GEST funds and if the training offered by the Christian Education Movement matches the needs of LEAs/schools they may be able to benefit indirectly from GEST funding.

The Assembly recognises the important role religious education makes in contributing to the moral, spiritual and cultural development of children and welcomes the work undertaken by the Christian Education Movement in Wales in the promotion of religious education in schools but I have no plans for the Assembly to provide direct financial assistance to the Christian Education Movement in Wales.

Primary School Class Sizes

David Davies: Is the Secretary for Education and Children able to ascertain whether in each key stage the percentage of primary school pupils in class sizes of 30 or more has risen or fallen over the past 3 years? (WAQ1465VB)

David Davies: Will the Secretary for Education and Children publish a table detailing the percentage of primary school pupils in each key stage who are in classes with 30 or more pupils and the percentage of primary schools classes, for each key stage, that contain 30 or more pupils? (WAQ1466VB)

Rosemary Butler: It is not possible to ascertain whether in each key stage the percentage of primary school pupils in class sizes of 30 or more has risen or fallen in the past three years because until January 1998 class size information was not collected by key stage.

The latest available figures on the percentage of classes and pupils in classes of over 30, relating to January 1998 and 1999, are contained in tables 7 to 9 of the Statistical Release SDR 24/99, 'Class Sizes in Primary Schools, January 1999', which was published on 11 June 1999. A copy is in the Library.

A primary school class size count was undertaken on 28 September across Wales, which will show the current position. The results will be published as soon as possible, probably in early November.

Questions to the Secretary for Education and Training

UNESCO World Mathematics Year 2000

Gareth Jones: (With reference to answer WAQ343VB) In view of the apparent lack of progress regarding the planning arrangement for the UNESCO world Mathematics Year 2000, does the Secretary for Education and Training have any plans to appoint a Wales co-ordinator for this event along the lines of the appointment made in England some months ago? (WAQ1447VB)

The Secretary for Education and Training (Tom Middlehurst): Wales is actively involved in planning for the UK Maths Year 2000, which is intended to complement UNESCO's designated World Mathematics Year. Assembly officials are continuing their discussions with other Government departments and Welsh local education authorities. The issue of appointing a Wales co-ordinator for Maths Year 2000 is under consideration. I will report the outcome to the Under-16 Education Committee in due course.