

Written Questions answered from 30 September to 7 October 1999

[R] signifies the Member has declared an interest.

Contents

2	Questions to the First Secretary
4	Questions to the Secretary for the Environment and Local Government
13	Questions to the Secretary for Economic Development
17	Questions to the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development
21	Questions to the Secretary for Post-16 Education and Training
25	Questions to the Secretary for Health and Social Services
28	Questions to the Secretary for Education and Children
29	Questions to the Finance Secretary

Questions to the First Secretary

Assembly Translators (Extra Staff)

Nick Bourne: How many additional translators have been employed by the Welsh Office/National Assembly for Wales since the referendum in 1997 and what is the additional annual cost to the Assembly budget? (WAQ978VB)

The First Secretary: The number of additional translators employed since the referendum in 1997 is 11. The cost to the Assembly budget is £183,541 based on current staff costs. The Assembly's Translation Service are in the process of recruiting a further 11 staff. The costs for these staff are not yet known, but are expected to be of a similar figure.

Post Office Closures 1998-99

Nick Bourne: Will the First Secretary make a statement regarding the number of post office closures in Wales over the last year, and the policy of the Government of Wales relating to maintaining a full network of post offices in urban and rural Wales? (WAQ981VB)

The First Secretary: Matters relating to the day-to-day operations of the postal businesses such as opening or closures of individual post offices throughout the UK are the responsibility of Post Office management. The vast majority of post offices are privately owned and neither the Post Office nor the Department of Trade and Industry, which sponsors it, can guarantee that no office will ever close if it is not sufficiently well used. However, we have maintained a close interest in the development of policies and proposals affecting post office services in Wales including the arrangements for ensuring that the views of Welsh users of those services are heard.

I have taken a keen personal interest in issues relating to the Post Office, in particular the effect on local communities of the closure of rural post offices. I recently met Dr Neville Bain, Chairman of the Post Office Board UK and Northern Ireland, and Lewis Evans, Chairman of the Post Office Board Wales to represent to them the importance of taking the wider economic and social significance of the local post office fully into account.

I welcome the UK Government's firm commitment, set out in the White Paper on Post Office Reform, to a viable network of post offices across the country so as to ensure nation-wide access to a range of public and private sector services, and also its intention to set minimum criteria for access to post office counters' services.

Post Office Closures 1995-99

Glyn Davies: How many post offices in Wales have closed during the first six months of 1999 and how many post offices closed in Wales in each of the last five years? (WAQ1078JS)

The First Secretary: I understand from the Post Office that, between 1 January and 30 June 1999, nine post offices in Wales closed and two post offices opened, giving a net figure of seven closures.

The number of post offices that closed in the last five years is: 19 in 1995; 43 in 1996; 36 in 1997; 20 in 1998; 18 in 1999. In each case the year in question is from 1 April to 31 March and the figures are net.

Sixth Form Expenditure

David Davies: What is the average amount of money spent for each sixth form in Wales at present and for each of the last three years? (WAQ1199VB)

The First Secretary: Expenditure by local education authorities on sixth forms cannot be identified within the present system in the way requested. The average amount budgeted to be spent per pupil in all local authority maintained schools in 1999-2000, was £2,660.

The amounts for the previous three years are as follows:

1998-99	£2,514 (budgeted spend)
1997-98	£2,379 (out-turn)
1996-97	£2,369 (out-turn)

Assembly Special Advisers (Cost)

David Davies: What is the expected total cost of each Assembly Secretary's special advisers for the current financial year and the next three years? How many advisers are there in total and attached to each Secretary and what are their salaries? (WAQ1200VB)

The First Secretary: I have appointed four special advisers to assist Cabinet colleagues and myself collectively. In a full financial year, and based on the current salary levels of the four special advisers, the total cost would be £131,700. In the financial year 1999-2000, given that the special advisers were appointed at various points after the start of the financial year, the actual cost will be £109,000 in total.

Water Rates (Intervention)

David Davies: What plans does the First Secretary have to intervene over the setting of water rates? (WAQ1211JS)

The First Secretary: The determination of price limits for water companies in England and Wales is a matter for the Director General of Water Services. He is consulting presently on his proposals for water price limits for the next five years, from April 2000 to March 2005. As I said earlier this month at the opening of the Swansea waste water treatment works, we have a clear role to play because of the Assembly's responsibilities for the environment and quality of public drinking water supplies in Wales. The Assembly also has a wider duty to the Welsh people to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is adopted to consider the long term benefit of environmental improvements while taking into account the commercial and regulatory pressures on water companies. For these reasons I am bringing the key players in this process together to seek to co-ordinate such an approach in Wales.

Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (Number of Appointments)

David Davies: How many appointments are made by Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies in Wales? (WAQ1209JS)

The First Secretary: There are currently 230 public appointments positions on Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies in Wales. Appointments are made by the Assembly in accordance with the Assembly's code of practice rather than by those bodies themselves.

Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (Paid Appointments)

David Davies: How many paid appointments are there on Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies in Wales? (WAQ1210JS)

The First Secretary: There are currently 109 paid appointments on Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies in Wales.

Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

David Melding: What plans does the First Secretary have for the Assembly to observe the United Nation's Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities? (WAQ1213VB)

The First Secretary: In 1993, the UK signed the United Nation's Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities which provide a framework against which policies in this field are reviewed and developed. Statutory responsibility for equal opportunities functions, including disability, remains with the UK Government and has not been transferred to the Assembly. However, in exercising its functions and conducting its business, the Assembly adheres to the principle of equality of opportunity for all people and Jane Hutt as Assembly Secretary for Health and Social Services will lead responsibility for equalities will seek to work with Disability Wales and the new Disability Rights Commission to promote the principles and spirit of equality.

Maintenance of School Buildings

Peter Black: What structures are in place to enable local education authorities and the Welsh Assembly to discuss and disseminate best practice in the maintenance of school buildings? (WAQ1392VB)

The First Secretary: Constructional standards for school buildings are set out in Welsh Office Circular 54/97. In addition, the attention of local education authorities in Wales is drawn to Building Bulletins and Design Notes published by the Department for Education and Employment's Architects and Buildings Branch, which include advice on best practice on school building matters. If you have a particular issue in mind I will be happy to look into it.

Questions to the Secretary for the Environment and Local Government (Peter Law)

A449 Speed Limit

David Davies: Will Peter Law consider introducing a speed limit on the A449 at certain points which pass close to residential areas, to cut noise pollution? (WAQ1001VB)

Peter Law: The A449 between the Coldra roundabout on the M4 and Raglan is part of a high speed, inter-urban route and has been built to the high standards appropriate for such use. The introduction of a speed limit below the current national limit would be inappropriate for this type of route and would be very difficult to enforce, as it would not be essentially self-regulating.

The A449 between Coldra and Usk has recently been reconstructed with a noise reducing surfacing, known as 'whisper concrete', which had not been developed when the Usk to Raglan section was reconstructed in conventional brushed concrete in 1994/5.

Mitigating noise on existing roads is the subject of a current study, which will take about six months to complete. It will recommend criteria to be used in determining those trunk road locations that are considered to experience excessive traffic noise. These will then be identified and considered in greater detail to determine whether practical and cost-effective noise mitigation measures can be justified.

The Government has also given a commitment to undertake a review of speed limit policy, as detailed in the White Paper published in 1998. This review being undertaken by Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions will be completed later this year and is considering how best to deliver the White Paper objectives relating to the environment, economy and quality of life, while remaining effective at improving road safety.

The subject of noise experienced by residents living adjacent to the trunk road network in Wales is a matter of concern to us all and the results of the above studies will be reported to the Assembly to enable it to agree future policy on this issue. The situation on the A449 will then be reviewed in accordance with this policy.

Wye Navigation Order

David Davies: Will there be a decision on the Wye Navigation Order before a second Transfer of Functions Order is signed? (WAQ1004VB)

Peter Law: The application by the Environment Agency to become the navigation authority on the river Wye has been submitted under Section 3 of the Transport and Works Act 1992. In accordance with schedules 1 and 2 of The National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 1999, the Order making function under section 3 of the Transport and Works Act 1992 is a matter for the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, subject to the agreement of the Assembly, as any Order would have effect both in Wales and England. It will be for the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to decide when he is in a position to submit a draft of his Order to the Assembly for approval. It cannot be submitted until the post inquiry representations have been resolved.

Transfer Orders are made by Order-in-Council with the consent of Parliament. Their timing is not under my, or the Assembly's, control. However, some omissions and drafting deficiencies in the first such Order have been identified and I expect the UK Government to bring forward a second, much briefer, Order to correct these as soon as possible after Parliament returns in October. As this Order will amend the first one, it will need to be approved by the Assembly in Plenary session under section 22(4)(b) of the Government of Wales Act 1998.

Consultants (Cost)

David Davies: How much money is Peter Law's department spending on consultants and would he i) list the consultants being used and ii) specify the reason for each consultant being used? (WAQ1015VB)

Peter Law: Expenditure incurred in the current financial year on external consultants in the areas for which I am responsible is expected to amount to £990,000. Details of these consultancies are as follows:

Consultant Appointed	Reason for Consultancy
Not yet appointed	In connection with a review of the Highways Directorate, to examine the effectiveness of the procedures for planning and progress of major roads.
Not yet appointed	To undertake research and prepare a biodiversity action plan and design guidance for the improvement and management of the trunk road 'soft estate'.
Babtie Group	To furnish Engineering advice to Network Management Division.
George Corderoy and Co.	To furnish specialist quantity surveying advice on financial aspects of major projects in connection with contractual claims and arbitrations.
Earth Science Partnership and Hyder Consulting Ltd	To furnish specialist advice on geotechnical aspects of design work on new improvement schemes to ensure economical design.
Aspen Burrow and Crocker	To undertake a technical audit of agent authorities to test the effectiveness of the management of trunk road networks, identify good practice and disseminate and assist in updating advice to staff and agents.
Halcrow	To furnish technical advice on aspects of private finance initiative (roads).
Wilde Sapte	To furnish advice on legal aspects of private finance initiative (roads).
Ernst & Young	To furnish advice on financial aspects of private finance initiative (roads).
EC Harris	To furnish a valuation of the road network for the Assembly's annual resource accounts.
Cardiff Business School	To furnish advice in connection with the Best Value in Wales programme (Local Government).
PION Economics (a commercial arm of Salford University)	To undertake research on population disbursement in connection with a review of the standard spending assessment formula.
HACAS Ltd	To undertake a review of the rent officer service to make recommendations for the most cost-effective structure and geographical location for the service.
Various small commissions (£1,000 in total)	To calculate noise levels in connection with the noise insulation programme.

Reducing Tax on Fuel

David Davies: Will Peter Law enter into discussions with colleagues with a view to reducing the tax on fuel before recent price increases have an adverse effect on Welsh rural communities? (WAQ995VB)

Peter Law: When decisions are under consideration by Government it is our policy to make sure that, wherever possible, the impact on Wales is assessed and drawn to the attention of Ministers. In this case, a decision taken by the previous government committed the UK to annual real increases in road fuel duties as part of its strategy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from road transport and tackle climate change.

The Assembly is pursuing policies to increase the availability of public transport in rural Wales. These include £3 million this year under the bus subsidy grant scheme to enable local authorities to increase the number of subsidised local bus services in rural Wales. In addition, the Welsh rural transport grant was launched earlier this year with £250,000 to support services in remoter parts of rural Wales where conventional transport solutions may not be appropriate. An Assembly grant of £150,000 supports the Community Transport Association's Welsh rural transport worker together with a telephone advice line.

Beef on School Dinner Menu (Newport)

David Davies: What steps is Peter Law taking to encourage Newport County Borough Council to allow beef to be served on the school dinner menu? (WAQ998VB)

Peter Law: We are keen to encourage consumption of Welsh beef in as many outlets as possible. It is particularly important to maximise the market potential for Welsh beef as the date based export scheme came into being on 1 August and the first beef exports have already left for Europe.

While it is ultimately up to the individual local authorities to determine their own policy with respect to the inclusion, or otherwise of beef on school menus, I can assure you that we are taking active steps to ensure that all potential markets for Welsh beef are pursued.

Bus Ridership Figures

David Davies: Will Peter Law list annual bus ridership figures from 1992 to 1998 in (a) Monmouth and (b) Wales? (WAQ1014VB)

Peter Law: The available figures are broad estimates only, based on a sample survey of public service vehicle operators carried out by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The figures relate to passenger journeys on local services only, throughout Wales and in the former county of Gwent.

Estimated number of passenger journeys on local bus services (million)

Year	Wales	Gwent
1991/92	133	26
1992/93	129	28
1993/94	133	31
1994/95	132	31
1995/96	127	30
1996/97	130	30
1997/98	120	..

.. reliable estimate not available

Use of Lead Shot

David Davies: Will Peter Law meet with the Countryside Alliance before implementing any legislation that will restrict the use of lead shot? (WAQ1005VB)

Peter Law: Legislation in Wales on restricting the use of lead shot is a matter for the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Partnership Council

David Davies: Will Conservative councillors be represented on the Partnership Council? (WAQ1006VB)

Peter Law: It is for the different constituent groups in the Partnership Council to decide whom they nominate for membership.

A449 Resurfacing

David Davies: When is the A449 next scheduled for resurfacing and is any work due to be carried out between Usk and Monmouth? (WAQ1002VB)

Peter Law: The A449 between the Coldra interchange on the M4 and Raglan has been reconstructed in three stages, which were completed in 1994, 1995 and 1999. The schemes were designed with a 40-year design life, with minor work plus a possible resurfacing at half-life required. The carriageway should not require major resurfacing for about 20 years.

The A40 between Usk and Monmouth is nearing the end of its effective life. Extensive work on this section of road will therefore be required within the next few years. Final decisions on the timing and extent of the works required will be made on receipt of the engineering assessment currently in progress and will be subject to the availability of finance within the trunk road maintenance budget.

Supermarkets (Controls on Development)

Nick Bourne: Will Peter Law introduce tighter controls with regard to the development of supermarkets? (WAQ982VB)

Peter Law: In April this year, the Secretary of State for Wales issued new guidance on retail development in 'Planning Guidance (Wales) Planning Policy, First Revision'. This guidance strengthens policy in a number of ways. It encourages new retail development to locate in town centres. Only if town centre sites are not available are out-of-centre sites to be considered and then only if accessible by a choice of means of transport. It also advises that out-of-town food supermarkets should not be allowed if their provision would be likely to lead to a loss of general food retailing in the centre of smaller towns. In addition, for the first time, the guidance allows the need for additional shopping provision to be considered in development plans, in the identification of sites, and in the consideration of planning applications. This guidance is fully up-to-date, but it will be reviewed and updated as and when necessary.

Rail Transport Concessions

Nick Bourne: Will Peter Law consider the provision of similar concessions on rail transport as those proposed for bus travel for senior citizens? (WAQ984)

Peter Law: The Assembly intends to introduce a free concessionary bus travel scheme for pensioners within the next three years in conjunction with our partners in local government. As far as rail is concerned, the shadow Strategic Rail Authority is already required to ensure that train operators participate in approved discount schemes including one for senior citizens. Train operators fulfil this obligation through the senior railcard scheme.

Rail Services (Improvements)

Nick Bourne: What improvements in rail services in Wales is Peter Law seeking to bring about? (WAQ985)

Peter Law: The statutory responsibility for railways policy (both passenger and freight services) lies with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The shadow Strategic Rail Authority and the Rail Regulator are responsible for franchising services and monitoring quality. The Assembly will be consulted on all issues affecting Wales, and will work closely with all these regulatory bodies.

Strategically, we shall take account of the views of local authorities, consumer bodies and operating companies in formulating views, which will influence our immediate investment priorities and inform the forthcoming negotiations on new franchises. I have also commissioned a study of transport links, including rail, between north and south Wales, which will support investment decisions for that route.

A number of specific proposals for improvement of rail infrastructure have been submitted for funding support by local authorities under the transport grant arrangements and these are being considered currently along with bids for other modes of transport. We will ensure that the investment proposals approved will contribute towards the development of an integrated transport system and demonstrate value for money.

North-South Rail Links

Nick Bourne: What is Peter Law doing to facilitate improvements in north-south rail links in Wales? (WAQ986)

Peter Law: A contract has been awarded to consultants Babtie Group Ltd, to consider the best way in which the Assembly can improve transport links between north and south Wales. The study will look at existing and potential travel demands for all types of transport including rail. It will consider the environmental and economic implications of any proposal, and the consultants will report back to the Assembly by early 2000. That will ensure that the Assembly can make a meaningful contribution to the shadow Strategic Rail Authority's renegotiation of rail franchise agreements. In addition, local authorities in north Wales are investigating whether improvements in connections between trains can be obtained. We are committed to improving direct services between north and south Wales but this must be achieved in a cost-effective way.

Rural Public Transport

Nick Bourne: Will Peter Law make a statement regarding rural public transport? (WAQ987)

Peter Law: Public transport, particularly the bus, has an especially important role in rural communities, providing a lifeline to people potentially vulnerable to the effects of social exclusion. In some areas, rail services have an equally important role. Efficient public transport is central to our policies for developing an integrated transport solution to meet the social, environmental and economic needs of Wales.

The Assembly's bus subsidy grant scheme has been extended and the budget has been increased to £5 million. £3 million is to be used for extra services in rural areas and £2 million at authorities' discretion for services in rural or urban areas. That will help Welsh local authorities to subsidise non-commercial local services—many operated in rural areas—by approximately £10 million annually and should allow local authorities to increase by over 60 per cent the provision of socially necessary bus services.

The £250,000 Welsh rural transport grant was introduced this year to support services in remoter rural areas where conventional transport solutions may not be appropriate. An Assembly grant of £150,000 supports the Community Transport Association's Welsh rural transport worker and a telephone advice line.

Pontypridd (Signposting on M4)

Owen John Thomas: Will Peter Law consider raising Pontypridd's profile through placing the town's name on road signs on the M4? (WAQ1186VB)

Peter Law: Signing of destinations from motorways is provided in accordance with nationally agreed principles.

Fundamentally, that means that, at a motorway junction, one destination is signed to the north of the motorway and one to the south. The decision on which towns to sign takes many factors into account, such as strategic importance, size and location. In the case of Junction 32 at Coryton, Merthyr is signed to the north and Cardiff to the south.

Ideally, we would all agree that all towns within a reasonable distance of the motorway should be signed. However, this would lead to sign clutter on the motorway, which would be aesthetically undesirable and, in some locations such as Coryton, pose practical and road safety problems.

The wish to promote Pontypridd is fully understood but, for the reasons given, together with the fact that the A470 is signed from the M4 and Pontypridd is well signed from this trunk road, I do not consider that varying the current policy is justified.

Digital Speed Cameras (Roads in Wales)

Peter Black: What plans there are to introduce digital speed cameras onto motorways and major 'A' roads in Wales? (WAQ1178VB)

Peter Law: There are no proposals at present to introduce digital speed cameras, for enforcement purposes, on any trunk roads in Wales. None of the digital speed cameras on the market have Home Office approval for general use, although this is actively being sought by the manufacturers.

Longer-term considerations, in line with our policy of making better use of the network, could include the provision of digital speed cameras on roads such as the M4 and the A55.

Student Houses (Licensing and Inspection)

Peter Black: Will Peter Law consider taking action to bring student houses not classed as houses in multiple occupation into a mandatory licensing and inspection regime? (WAQ1190VB)

Peter Law: Most student housing is occupied by four to six people, usually unrelated, and will be included in the proposed licensing scheme. For student houses with a lower level of

occupancy, local authorities already have the enforcement powers, primarily under the Housing Act 1985, to ensure that they are properly managed and controlled. Responses to the recent consultation paper on licensing for houses in multiple occupation are currently being considered and I will report these to the Environment and Local Government Committee later this year.

Railways (Levels of Service)

Jenny Randerson: Will Peter Law arrange an urgent meeting between representatives of railway companies operating in Wales and Assembly Members to discuss the economic implications of the current levels of service? (WAQ1104JS)

Peter Law: The current levels of services are the responsibility of the shadow Strategic Rail Authority. I and the Environment and Local Government Committee will need to obtain the train operators' views when developing Assembly policy on rail, in particular prior to the forthcoming franchise renegotiations. The train operating companies have appointed an officer responsible for liaison with the Assembly and we will ensure that our wish to secure improved services will be made known to them. The Assembly will also have a valuable opportunity to make our views known prior to the forthcoming franchise renegotiations and I shall ensure that this is pursued vigorously.

North-South Road Links (Passing Places)

Peter Black: What plans does Peter Law have for bringing forward plans to create passing places on the road links between north and south Wales? (WAQ1060JS)

Peter Law: There are no plans for the creation of passing places on the road links between north and south Wales. This issue will be considered as part of the ongoing north-south links transportation study.

Improvements to the A458

Glyn Davies: What priority is given to improvements to the A458 between Welshpool and the English border? (WAQ1061JS)

Peter Law: The conclusions drawn on this valuable link between mid Wales and the English Midlands following the 1998 review of the trunk road programme are outlined in paragraph 6.65 of 'Driving Wales Forward', a copy of which is in the library.

Consideration is being given to accident reduction measures between Buttington Cross and Middletown. Any longer-term improvements to the A458 are subject to further study and consultation and the availability of resources.

Reimbursement for Housing Benefit (Local Councils)

Brian Gibbons: Does Peter Law have any plans to alleviate the relative disadvantage which local councils experience in obtaining reimbursement for housing benefit compared to other housing providers? (WAQ932VB)

Peter Law: I appreciate the concern expressed about the subsidy system inherited from the previous Government. We have already indicated that we intend to reform the system to separate out rent rebates from the subsidy system. Any reforms will need to consider carefully the net financial effect on the Welsh assigned budget. The surpluses of all Welsh authorities contribute approaching £100 million towards rent rebates. If local authorities were allowed to

retain these surpluses, then an equivalent amount of money would need to be found from other programmes.

Babtie Group Ltd. Study (Terms of Reference and Timetable)

Peter Black: What are the terms of reference of the study being carried out by Babtie Group Ltd. into transport links between north and south Wales and what is the timetable for the report of its study? (WAQ1027VB)

Peter Law: The consultants are required to consider the best way in which the Assembly can improve transport links between north and south Wales. This will be the first comprehensive study to consider improvements to the trunk road network and the existing and potential travel demands for all types of transport, including rail and bus services. It will consider the environmental and economic implications of any proposal as part of the development of our integrated transport policy. It is hoped that it will contribute valuable data to assist in the strategic development of north-south public transport links. The consultants' report is to be completed by March 2000.

Supporting Documentation (Charges)

Peter Black: Will Peter Law consider offering advice to local authorities on charging for copies of supporting documentation to planning applications, such as environmental assessments, so as to make them more affordable? (WAQ1017VB)

Peter Law: Local planning authorities are required to keep a register of planning applications, including plans and drawings, and related environmental statements available for public inspection at no charge. In addition, the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 require applicants to make a reasonable number of copies of an environmental statement available to the public, either free of charge or at a reasonable cost reflecting printing and distribution costs. I have no plans to issue further advice on these matters.

Japanese Knotweed (Control)

Peter Black: What funding is available to assist Welsh local authorities in tackling the problem of Japanese knotweed? (WAQ930VB)

Peter Law: Specific funding is not available to local authorities for the control of Japanese knotweed. The bulk of revenue resources provided to local authorities are not earmarked for any particular service. It is for each authority to determine how best to use its resources in light of its own priorities.

Cleaner Fuels (Vehicles)

Peter Black: What measures are Peter Law taking to encourage the use of vehicles driven by cleaner fuels such as liquid gas, nitrogen and electricity in Wales? (WAQ931VB)

Peter Law: In his last budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer reduced the duty on road fuel gases by 29 per cent to encourage greater use. The use of such fuels is being promoted in Wales through our green transport policies. The Welsh Transport Advisory Group's best practice guidance note on green transport plans points to the potential for use of alternative fuels in fleet vehicles. The Assembly's green transport plan for Cathays Park contains a commitment to examine the potential for use of liquefied petroleum in Assembly vehicles.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Newport)

Peter Black: What impact will Government proposals to improve the protection of sites of special scientific interest have on the proposed new section of the M4 around Newport? (WAQ929VB)

Peter Law: The construction of the relief road is one of several options being considered, and it is too early to determine what recommendations will be brought to the Assembly for consideration. The protection of SSSIs will be taken into account when a decision whether to proceed with the relief road is taken.

Mineral Planning Guidelines (Review)

Peter Black: What work is being undertaken to review the mineral planning guidelines for Wales and what is the timetable for the completion of such a review? (WAQ928VB)

Peter Law: Officials are working on current mineral planning guidance for Wales with a view to preparing a single consolidated policy document which, like that for planning policy guidance—will be supported by a series of technical advice notes. Work is progressing well. The draft mineral planning guidance policy document, and the first of the proposed draft mineral technical advice notes, should be issued for public consultation later this autumn.

Questions to the Secretary for Economic Development (Rhodri Morgan)

Cardiff Bay Barrage (Closure)

Peter Black: What is the anticipated annual cost of removing algae from and oxygenating the artificial lake which will be created following the closure of Cardiff Bay barrage and who will be paying that bill following the winding up of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation? (WAQ1201VB)

Rhodri Morgan: The Corporation has estimated the annual cost of removing algae from the impounded freshwater lake to be about £165,000 a year, falling after five years to around £85,000.

The Corporation has now put forward a proposal for oxygenating the inland bay to the standards required by the Environment Agency and the Cardiff Bay Barrage Act 1993. Under the commercial confidentiality rules, it is not possible at this stage to publish the costs you requested. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to you with that information once he is in a position to do so.

National Botanic Gardens and Aberglasney Gardens

Nick Bourne: What actions does the Secretary for Economic Development propose to take to raise and maximise the best potential of the National Botanic Garden and Aberglasney gardens? (WAQ971)

Rhodri Morgan: The First Secretary opened Aberglasney gardens on 4 July 1999. They are now open to the public until the end of October, and will re-open on 1 April 2000. The restoration project has been the subject of a highly regarded BBC series. Aberglasney gardens and house are being restored with financial assistance and advice from CADW. However, much further work is required on the house.

The National Botanic Garden is due to open to the public in the spring of next year as a key millennium project. The Assembly has funded the construction of a grade-separated interchange and signing on the A48 which will provide good access to the gardens. Consideration is being given to a Stage II development proposed by the National Botanic Gardens.

The Wales Tourist Board is developing a marketing campaign for gardens of national and international significance in Wales, which will certainly include the National Botanic Gardens and Aberglasney. These will certainly assist in attracting additional tourists to the Tywi Valley and Carmarthenshire generally.

Investment and Jobs (Kidwelly)

Nick Bourne: What action is Rhodri Morgan taking to encourage investment and jobs in Kidwelly? (WAQ967VB)

Rhodri Morgan: Kidwelly will benefit from our overall drive to secure a higher percentage of the new jobs and investment coming to Wales for West Wales, as reflected in the targets for the Welsh Development Agency in that respect. There have been significant recent successes including Mitsui Kinzoku in Ammanford, International Rectifier and Cable and Wireless in Swansea, and Leaveland Shoe in Pembroke Dock. The development of a critical mass of activity in the area, the securing of Objective 1 status, which will help with measures to create jobs, and the establishment of the Assembly's new Industry and Training Department West Wales office at Penllergaer, will help encourage others to grow and to follow.

The Welsh Development Agency's Business and Product Development Division, along with its economic development partners, is actively working with eight key companies in the Kidwelly/Burry Port area.

Transport Strategy (Cardiff Bay)

Nick Bourne: Will Rhodri Morgan make a statement with regard to transport strategy in the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation area? (WAQ968VB)

Rhodri Morgan: Responsibility for the transport strategy for Cardiff rests with Cardiff County Council as the local highway authority, who are discussing the transport implications of developments in Cardiff Bay with the Development Corporation and my officials, with particular regard to the balance between public and private transport.

Waterbus Jetties (Cardiff Bay)

Nick Bourne: What provision is there in the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation area for waterbus jetties? (WAQ969)

Rhodri Morgan: Provision for waterbus jetties is being considered as part of a water use strategy in Cardiff Bay. No decisions have yet been agreed with the Corporation's successor bodies on their provision.

Employment (Ystradgynlais)

Nick Bourne: Will Rhodri Morgan make a statement on the job situation in Ystradgynlais, and what progress there has been in attracting new employers to the town? (WAQ970VB)

Rhodri Morgan: Since the closure of the Lucas Varsity facility at Ystradgynlais was announced, great efforts have been made to bring new opportunities to the area. We expect Lucas to employ 100 people at alternative premises in the area and are aware that 200 of those who lost their jobs have found alternative employment.

Negotiations with a potential purchaser of the Lucas Varsity site are well advanced and, if successful, could lead to the creation of more than 200 jobs in the next three years.

The opening of the Mitsui Kinzoku factory at Capel Hendre, Cable and Wireless in Swansea and International Rectifier at Penllergaer will undoubtedly benefit employment prospects for the catchment area adversely affected by the Lucas Varsity closure.

Enterprise Grant Area (Powys)

Glyn Davies: Will Rhodri Morgan do everything in his power to ensure that Powys is granted Enterprise Grant Area or equivalent status? (WAQ1068JS)

Rhodri Morgan: The current review of business support is seeking ideas for improvement to the current range of business support by reviewing the finance, advice and training provided to businesses by the public sector and related delivery channels. The primary aim is to make a significant contribution to closing the economic performance gap by stimulating the quality and quantity of job opportunities in Wales.

A decision on Enterprise Grant area status will be taken in this context. This may include designating areas for assistance for small and medium sized firms as has been done in the England regions. The needs of Powys and the representations of Powys County Council will then be taken into account.

Communication with Businesses

Alun Cairns: What communications does Rhodri Morgan have with businesses that are based in Wales? (WAQ1110VB)

Rhodri Morgan: I have frequent meetings with Welsh businesses on a weekly basis. These include company visits and openings, meetings and discussions with business organisations such as the CBI and chambers of commerce, together with ad hoc meetings to discuss particular issues of concern to companies. The First Secretary and other members of the Cabinet also meet business people frequently to discuss matters affecting Assembly responsibilities.

The National Assembly for Wales is under a statutory duty to consult businesses, under section 115 of the Government of Wales Act. The proposed arrangements, which have been informed by meetings with business organisations, are due to be discussed in Plenary on 30 September 1999. The framework that will be put in place to carry out the Assembly's statutory duty will be a major element of the partnership between the Assembly and business in Wales.

Regeneration in the Upper Swansea Valley

Alun Cairns: What plans does Rhodri Morgan have to regenerate the upper Swansea Valley in light of recent redundancies? (WAQ1109VB)

Rhodri Morgan: The Amman and Swansea Valleys Regeneration Partnership has been established to help co-ordinate the response of: the local councils, the Welsh Development Agency, the Employment Service and West Wales and Powys Training and Enterprise

Councils. An Assembly official attends the meetings of the Partnership. Recruitment for a full time Partnership development officer is underway.

The Welsh Development Agency is funding a study to produce a strategy for the economic regeneration of the Swansea Valley which would be taken forward by the Partnership. In addition, the Agency is dealing with a number of companies who have expressed a serious interest in the former Lucas site. The West Wales Training and Enterprise Council is also delivering a package of support measures in the area.

Negotiations are ongoing within the UK on the eligibility for Objective 2 funding of those parts of the Upper Swansea Valley which fall outside the Objective 1 area.

Aid for Business Start-up

Alun Cairns: What aid is Rhodri Morgan proposing to increase the numbers of business start-ups in Wales. (WAQ1108VB)

Rhodri Morgan: There are a number of initiatives already available through Business Connect to increase the number of new business start ups and further support measures will be considered in the context of the Wales entrepreneurship plan framework which is under development and the present review of business support in general.

European Funding Aid (Private Sector Companies)

Alun Cairns: What private sector companies succeeded in gaining European funding aid, and what sums of money, in the past 12 months? (WAQ1111VB).

Rhodri Morgan: In the past twelve months, 41 private sector companies gained direct Structural Fund grant aid for a total amount of £3,693,898. An itemised list has been placed in the Library. In addition many private sector companies access Structural Funds via public sector bodies, for example the Welsh Development Agency, local authorities, training and enterprise councils and so on. Likewise, private sector companies cannot apply directly for ESF funding except for Objective 4.

Assisted Area Map (Abercraf Ward)

Glyn Davies: Will Rhodri Morgan ensure that the Abercraf Ward in south-east Brecknockshire is included in the new assisted area map? (WAQ1075JS)

Rhodri Morgan: This is an extremely complex process which is a matter for the UK Government but we have been involved in very detailed discussions, as have Welsh Office Ministers.

In carrying out the review of the United Kingdom's assisted areas the Government had to use a methodology in line with European Commission guidelines to identify areas of need and opportunity while respecting the reduced limits on population coverage imposed by the Commission. The draft map that has been sent to the European Commission for approval accordingly reflects a proper balance between need and opportunity. The reduced population ceiling meant that not all requests for designation could be met. The needs of each area, including Abercraf, had to be assessed against objective criteria.

The map is still in draft form and subject to the approval of the European Commission. If the European Commission were to indicate opposition to the inclusion of some areas included in the draft map, other qualifying areas, including Abercraf, could then have the chance of replacing them, provided the population ceilings are not exceeded.

The Welsh Local Government Association is co-ordinating local authority priorities for any such exchanges of status. Their proposals will be carefully considered when they are to hand.

Questions to the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development (Christine Gwyther)

Organic Farming Scheme (Funding)

Glyn Davies: What public pledges of funding has Christine Gwyther given to back the organic farming scheme in Wales? (WAQ1066JS)

Christine Gwyther: On 19 July I announced that up to £1 million in grants for organic conversion would be made available during this financial year. Future funding for the organic farming scheme will be decided following consideration of the responses to the consultation document 'Farming for the Future' and, during the course of the budget planning round, it will be decided against the Assembly's other priorities.

Promoting Sale of Local Food

Nick Bourne: What measures is Christine Gwyther taking to encourage retail outlets to sell local food produce? (WAQ937VB)

Promoting Sale of Welsh Food

Nick Bourne: What measures is Christine Gwyther taking to promote the sale of Welsh food? (WAQ942VB)

Christine Gwyther: It is a matter for retail outlets to decide what products they sell in their stores but I would encourage the promotion and selling of local food produce as much as possible. On 8 March 1999, together with the three chairs of the industry-led working groups, the Secretary of State launched the Welsh Agri-Food Action Plans for the lamb and beef and the dairy and organic food sectors. The Welsh Agri-Food Action Plans have been designed to help develop a viable future for the Welsh food industry. They are based on a common vision—linking the primary produce of Welsh agriculture to profitable markets with more added value food processing. The National Assembly for Wales is providing funding of over £3.5 million for agri-food developments—£1.816 million for the Welsh Development Agency for food promotion; £0.350 million for the Marketing Development Scheme and £1.371 million for the Processing and Marketing Grant which supports marketing and investment in food processing.

The WDA Food Directorate has direct responsibility for food promotion in Wales. Its role is to lead economic development in the agri-food sector and to promote Welsh food. It will lead on the implementation of the Welsh Agri-Food Action Plans. It will be aided by the newly-formed Agri-Food Partnership which will take them forward, monitor progress in their implementation and regularly review and update them, in conjunction with the Assembly. The Agri-Food Partnership has established four Regional Agri-Food Groups in mid, north, west and south Wales, which will take forward the Welsh Agri-Food Action Plans at regional level, taking account of local priorities. To support this work, each WDA region has an agri-food co-ordinator who will work under the guidance of the WDA Food Directorate.

Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Ltd are a farmers co-operative with some 5,000 farmer members which was set up to promote Welsh lamb and beef. The WDA provides WL&BP with grant aid of £340,000 to support its work, which is about one-fifth of their total turnover. The WDA is currently in discussions with WL&BP to see how they can help the industry now

that the beef ban has been lifted. They have invited them to submit proposals and these are awaited. State aids restrictions are likely to require the industry to match any additional WDA funding, depending on what exactly is proposed. Sources of funding are being investigated. This briefing will be updated as proposals develop.

WL&BP's mission statement is to develop high value consumer demand for farm assured branded Welsh lamb and Welsh beef through the use of innovative strategic marketing campaigns specifically designed to promote Welsh beef and Welsh lamb to the consumer in selected targeted markets.

On Monday 5 July 1999 WL&BP launched with Safeway Plc the introduction of branded Welsh mountain lamb into Safeway supermarkets nationally within the UK. The launch of Welsh mountain lamb into a leading supermarket is of significant commercial importance to the Welsh sheep industry as it addresses one of the fundamental problems of the industry by finding a market for light lambs in the weight range 12.5-15.0 kgs. Lambs in this weight range have traditionally been difficult to market, particularly in the UK. WL&BP feel that the product is both innovative and imaginative and will be well received by the consumer.

On 26 April the WDA launched the new Taste of Wales hospitality scheme. This all-Wales scheme aims to promote the use of quality Welsh food and drink throughout the hospitality and tourism industries in Wales. It will do this by offering every hospitality outlet in Wales the opportunity to join a new, fully accredited, inspected and supported scheme confirming members' use of the best Welsh ingredients. It encourages and promotes the use of Welsh produce, its preparation and service, creating a distinctive quality image for the hospitality sector in Wales, thereby increasing business for both Welsh food producers and the Welsh hospitality industry. The scheme is backed by the WDA and the Welsh Tourist Board and has the support of the hospitality industry across Wales. It will mean that anyone visiting a catering or hospitality business displaying the attractive new logo will have the reassurance that the establishment is serving Welsh produce and it has subscribed to rigorous quality control standards to qualify for the Taste of Wales badge. I am pleased to report that the scheme has just recruited its hundredth member.

The WDA Food Directorate is undertaking an Objective 5b project called the Welsh Rural Speciality Food Group. It is co-financed with European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund. It promotes and markets the Welsh speciality food industry within the UK and overseas, particularly in the EU, while maintaining grass root contact with primary food producers through the creation of product related groups and with representation from Welsh regional development bodies such as Leader groups and the National Park Authorities. Groups already formed include a speciality cheese group (CAWS) and a wine group. In addition, the WDA Food Directorate is working closely with Food from Britain to promote food from Wales overseas and to promote Welsh speciality and fine foods at home and abroad.

The Meat and Livestock Commission also has a remit to promote greater efficiency in the livestock and livestock products industries of Great Britain and to promote the consumption of meat and meat products. It does this through generic advertising, undertaking research into production, processing, marketing and distribution of livestock and transferring the technology established in research products into the industry. It also helps to disseminate information useful to the industry and consumers.

Alun Michael as Secretary of State has supported proposals from Donald Curry, Chair of the MLC, to establish an MLC Welsh Council. The Council is chaired by Rees Roberts, MLC Commissioner for Wales and its membership covers a wide cross-section of the Welsh red meat sector including the farming unions, auctioneers and suppliers. The MLC established the

Council to strengthen its effectiveness in Wales. It will advise the MLC centrally on the needs of the industry in Wales.

Welsh foods are also promoted at agricultural shows, food fairs and exhibitions. The most recent example is the Royal Welsh Show, at which the WDA exhibited Welsh produce in the food hall.

Promoting Sales of Welsh Lamb

Nick Bourne: What is Christine Gwyther doing to promote the sales of Welsh lamb? (WAQ944VB)

Promoting Sales of Welsh Beef

Nick Bourne: What is Christine Gwyther doing to promote the sales of Welsh beef? (WAQ945VB)

Christine Gwyther: On 8 March 1999, together with the three chairmen of the industry-led working groups, the Secretary of State launched the Welsh Agri-Food Action Plans for the lamb and beef, dairy and organic sectors. The Welsh Agri-Food Action Plans have been designed to help develop a viable future for the Welsh food industry. They are based on a common vision—linking the primary produce of Welsh agriculture to profitable markets with more added-value food processing. The Assembly is providing funding of over £3.5 million for agri-food developments, including £1.816 million for the Welsh Development Agency for food promotion; £0.350 million for the Marketing Development Scheme and £1.371 million for the Processing and Marketing Grant which supports marketing and investment in food processing.

The Lamb and Beef Action Plan highlighted that one way forward for farmers to get a bigger stake in the supply chain, which is a crucial step for the industry, would be through the development of a strong farmer co-operative organisation. The organisation would have the potential to provide a vehicle for farmer investment in downstream processing and to provide a better position from which farmers could negotiate with their suppliers and customers. It recommended that particular support should be given to the establishment of an all-Wales Livestock Marketing Co-operative.

The Welsh Agri-Food Action Plans also recognise that small scale local co-operatives may be suitable for delivering niche products but ‘mainstream’ lamb and beef demand large scale co-operation. The shape of any new co-operative ventures is a matter for the industry itself to determine but the Assembly and the WDA will support co-operative ventures by farmers in the livestock sector which have genuine and significant potential to help the industry.

The First Secretary launched the proposal for an all-Wales livestock marketing co-operative on 12 July, along with a co-op information brochure which paves the way for the proposals. The proposal for an all-Wales livestock co-operative, which will complement local initiatives to promote niche marketing and speciality products in the livestock sector, was set out as one of the key recommendations in the Lamb and Beef Action Plan. Preliminary work with the industry has shown positive support for the proposal among farmers. A project team will take the assessment and development work forward as a background to setting up the company. Geoffrey John, a senior food industry figure in the UK, has joined the Lamb and Beef Strategy Group and will lead the project team to assess and supervise the preparation of a business plan for the livestock co-operative .

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lead on the implementation of the Welsh Agri-Food Action Plans. It is aided by the newly-formed Agri-Food Partnership which will take them forward, monitor progress in their implementation and regularly review and update them in conjunction with the Assembly. The Agri-Food Partnership has established four Regional Agri-Food Groups in mid, north, west and south Wales, which will take forward the Welsh Agri-Food Action Plans at regional level, taking account of local priorities. To support this work, each WDA region has an agri-food co-ordinator who will work under the guidance of the WDA Food Directorate. A Farm Development Strategy Group has been set up. It is an all-Wales steering group to drive development forward across all farming sectors.

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The Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) was established under the Agriculture Act 1967. The aim of the organisation is to promote greater efficiency in the livestock and livestock products industries of Great Britain and to promote the consumption of meat and meat products. It does this through generic advertising, undertaking research into production, processing, marketing and distribution of livestock and transferring the technology established in research products into the industry. It also helps to disseminate information useful to the industry and consumers.

The Secretary of State has supported proposals from Donald Curry, Chair of the MLC, to establish an MLC Welsh Council. The Council is chaired by Rees Roberts, MLC Commissioner for Wales, and its membership covers a wide cross-section of the Welsh red

meat sector including the farming unions, auctioneers and suppliers. The MLC established the Council to strengthen its effectiveness in Wales and it will advise the MLC centrally on the needs of the industry in Wales.

Private Storage Scheme (Welsh Lamb)

Nick Bourne: Will Christine Gwyther support the case for the introduction of an aid scheme for private storage of lamb for Wales? (WAQ1010VB)

Christine Gwyther: I have discussed this matter with colleagues from across the UK. As a result UK Agriculture Ministers have already approached the European Commission about the introduction of an aid scheme for private storage for sheepmeat in the United Kingdom.

Genetically Modified Organisms (Friends of the Earth)

Nick Bourne: Will Christine Gwyther support the position of Friends of the Earth in relation to the lawfulness of the Assembly acting not to grant consent to the GMO release trials, subject to the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment's advice being given to the Assembly in a specified form? (WAQ1008)

Genetically Modified Crops (Friends of the Earth)

Nick Bourne: Is Christine Gwyther aware of the legal advice given to Friends of the Earth that the Assembly can make representations to the UK Government in respect of genetically modified crops which already have EU GMO marketing consent, or which might be consented in the future? (WAQ1009)

Christine Gwyther: The paper presented to me by Friends of the Earth Cymru when I met them on 3 September detailed their views on the Assembly's role and powers in determining applications for the release of GMOs into the Welsh environment. This related both to future applications and to those which have already received consent. The paper is under consideration and I will respond to Friends of the Earth in the near future.

Right to Roam (Discussion)

Nick Bourne: Does Christine Gwyther plan to hold any discussions with her counterpart in England regarding the potential harmful impact of the right to roam in Wales? (WAQ1012VB)

Christine Gwyther: I met Nick Brown this month, and intend to continue to meet him on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of subjects. I will discuss the effects of the Government's proposals to secure greater access to the open countryside with him whenever it is appropriate to do so. However, I can assure you that I will seek to implement access to the open countryside in Wales in a way that is appropriate to, and benefits, the people of Wales.

Questions to the Secretary for Post-16 Education and Training (Tom Middlehurst)

Museums and Art Galleries in Cardiff

Nick Bourne: What plans does Tom Middlehurst have to enhance and extend museums and art galleries in Cardiff? (WAQ988)

Tom Middlehurst: The National Museums and Galleries of Wales recently opened the Art in Wales Gallery at its Cathays Park site and is continuing to improve its facilities and collections there and at the Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagans. The City and County of Cardiff received a grant of £33,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable it to prepare a conservation plan which will form the basis of a larger bid to the Fund to improve visitor facilities at Cardiff Castle. I was pleased to attend the opening of the Centre for Visual Arts in the former Cardiff Central Library recently. This is the largest exhibition gallery in Wales showing new and historical art and is fully equipped to host international standard contemporary art exhibitions.

Dedicated National Art Gallery for Wales

Nick Bourne: Will Tom Middlehurst support the setting up of a dedicated national art gallery for Wales, exclusively dedicated to art? (WAQ989VB)

Tom Middlehurst: The National Museums and Galleries of Wales has a comprehensive collection of paintings and sculpture by Welsh artists and is keen to develop its collections and exhibitions further. It recently opened the Art in Wales Gallery at the Cathays Park site which focuses on recent and contemporary work by Welsh artists.

The Museum plans to undertake a public consultation exercise on its future role, and on the strategy it should adopt in showing its collections. This consultation will provide the opportunity to consider the future options for displaying the art collection. Any proposals for new developments that emerged from the exercise would need to be considered in the light of the financial resources available to the National Museums and Galleries of Wales.

Training and Enterprise Councils (Representations)

Nick Bourne: What representations has Tom Middlehurst received concerning the future of the Training and Enterprise Councils and will he publish those representations? (WAQ992VB)

Tom Middlehurst: I have received representations concerning the future of the Training and Enterprise Councils from Nigel Bruce, Chairman of Mid Wales TEC; Carl Hadley, Chairman of Council of Welsh TECs; David Evans, Chief Executive of the Council of Welsh TECs; Elizabeth Haywood, Director of CBI (Wales); and Ken Jones, Chairman of CBI (Wales). When a formal consultation takes place, respondents are warned that their contributions may be published or made available to Assembly Members via the library unless there is a specific request that a submission be kept confidential. I have no plans to publish this correspondence which was not subject to any such notice.

ETAG Recommendations

David Davies: Which recommendation from the Education and Training Action Group for Wales report does Tom Middlehurst support? (WAQ1193VB)

Tom Middlehurst: I regard the recommendations as wholly welcome and positive. Thus I fully support the recommendation in the Education and Training Action Plan that a National Council for Education and Training be established for Wales. We are currently considering the detailed aspects of the role and functions of the council, and other matters related to the plan. I want to see the plan implemented in the best interests of individuals, communities and employers in Wales.

HE Funding (Overseeing Body)

David Davies: Will Tom Middlehurst support the recommendation in ETAG's report that a National Council for Education and Training be set up to oversee higher education funding in Wales? (WAQ1194VB)

Tom Middlehurst: The Education and Training Action Plan for Wales does not recommend that the National Council for Education and Training in Wales should oversee higher education funding in Wales, and I have no plans to introduce such arrangements.

National Council for Education and Training (Cost Estimate)

David Davies: What is Tom Middlehurst's estimate of the cost of funding a National Council for Education and Training? (WAQ1195VB)

Tom Middlehurst: We are currently considering the detailed aspects of the role and functions of the National Council for Education and Training for Wales. Preliminary financial estimates indicate a potential budget for the new Council of around £400 million.

Community Consortia for Education and Training (Cost Estimate)

David Davies: What is his estimate of the cost of setting up a Community Consortium for Education and Training Group? (WAQ1196VB)

Tom Middlehurst: At this stage I envisage that there will be a number of local Community Consortia for Education and Training, of varying sizes, and that any costs in setting up each of these will be largely borne by the partners in each consortium.

The New Deal (Employment Figures)

David Davies: How many people have been employed under the New Deal in Wales since May 1999? (WAQ1207JS)

Tom Middlehurst: Employment policy is reserved to the UK Government, which takes the lead on funding and delivery of the New Deal. In Wales, it does this in partnership with the Assembly and contributing Welsh organisations.

Information on the progress of the New Deal in Wales is available up to the end of June 1999. During June 1999:

- 797 young people entered jobs from the New Deal for 18-24s;
- 157 older long-term unemployed people left the New Deal for 25 Plus for work;
- 163 people on the New Deal for Lone Parents secured jobs.

Including the New Deal for Disabled People pilot in the Eastern Valleys and the prototype Employment Zone in north-west Wales, this brings the total number of jobs secured through the New Deal in Wales to over 12,000.

Wales Millenium Centre (Penalty Clauses)

Jonathan Morgan: Do the company/companies building the Wales Millennium Centre have penalty clauses built into their contracts in the event of a delay in the completion of the building? (WAQ1214VB)

Tom Middlehurst: Wales Millennium Centre Ltd anticipates that the building contracts for the new Centre will include the usual clauses addressing delays which are the responsibility of the building contractor.

Wales Millennium Centre (Fines or Penalties)

Jonathan Morgan: Will the company/companies building the Millennium Centre be fined or penalised for the delay in the opening of the Millennium Centre? (WAQ1215VB)

Tom Middlehurst: Contracts for building the Wales Millennium Centre have not yet been let, so the question of fines or penalties for delay does not arise.

Wales Millennium Centre (Opening Date)

Jonathan Morgan: On what date is the Wales Millennium Centre expected to open? (WAQ1216VB)

Tom Middlehurst: Wales Millennium Centre Ltd now anticipate opening the new building in mid 2002. They will not announce a precise date until the building contracts have been let.

Wales Millennium Centre (Delayed Opening Date)

Jonathan Morgan: Why has the opening of the Millennium Centre been delayed? (WAQ1217VB)

Tom Middlehurst: A great deal of preparatory work was required before work could begin on the construction of the Wales Millennium Centre. This included the main financial agreements, planning permissions, the acquisition of the site, and the reorganisation of road links. These necessary processes took a longer time than Wales Millennium Centre originally hoped, and this has meant that they have not yet been able to specify a precise opening date.

Community Consortia for Education and Training (Collaboration)

Jonathan Morgan: How will the Community Consortia for Education and Training, as provided for in the Education and Training Action Group, foster collaboration between the sectors to deliver post-16 education and training? (WAQ1223VB)

Tom Middlehurst: Community Consortia for Education and Training will foster collaboration between the sectors to deliver post-16 education by providing an explicit forum through which the work of the partners can be concerted and planned to achieve better results. The financial and management arrangements will also foster effective co-operation to provide the best standards of post-16 education and training in sixth forms, in FE colleges and in the workplace and community.

Sixth Form Funding (ETAG Proposals)

Jonathan Morgan: Will Tom Middlehurst make it his policy to guarantee that sixth form funding will be maintained, in real terms, after the implementation of the Education and Training Action Group's proposals? (WAQ1231VB)

Tom Middlehurst: As is the case for all Assembly programmes, decisions on funding are taken year by year. However our plans provide for substantial real terms increases in funding for local authority education functions. Schools will benefit across the board.

While I cannot pre-empt our conclusions on the action plan, I can guarantee that the new system will be designed in the best interests of our pupils, students and communities—and to meet the needs of employers. I can also give an absolute assurance of our determination that funding should be made available to secure a vibrant pattern of provision post-16, not least through sixth forms themselves. Any changes to the arrangements for funding sixth forms will be subject to the most careful technical examination and consultation, as indeed ETAG suggested that they should be.

Questions to the Secretary for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt)

Prince Philip Hospital, Llanelli (Fourth Consultant)

Nick Bourne: Will Jane Hutt use her influence with Dyfed Powys Health Authority to secure the appointment of a fourth consultant at the Prince Philip Hospital, Llanelli? (WAQ966VB)

Jane Hutt: The appointment of consultants is in the first instance a matter for the trust and the health authority who are working within the constraints of the serious financial situation in the region. From my visit to Llanelli and Carmarthen earlier this month I know the new Carmarthenshire NHS Trust board is committed to provide this additional surgical cover as soon as the necessary resources can be identified.

It is precisely for such reasons that it is so important to achieve order to the chaotic financial regimes we inherited in NHS Wales and create headroom so that the large additional sums we are putting into the NHS are directed to patient care and health improvement.

Time taken to fill Nursing Posts in Wales

Alan Cairns: What is the average time taken to fill a nursing post in hospitals in Wales? (WAQ1092)

Jane Hutt: This information is not held centrally, but my officials are currently carrying out a survey of NHS Trusts in Wales to establish up to date information on nurse recruitment. Information on the length of time taken to fill vacancies will be collected as part of this exercise, the results of which should be available by the end of October. I shall write to the member for South Wales West with the information at that time. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Assembly Library.

Time taken to fill Nursing Posts in South West Wales

Alan Cairns: What is the average time taken to fill a nursing post in each hospital in the South Wales West region? (WAQ1091)

Jane Hutt: This information is not held centrally, but my officials are currently carrying out a survey of NHS Trusts in Wales to establish up to date information on nurse recruitment. Information on the length of time taken to fill vacancies will be collected as part of this exercise, the results of which should be available by the end of October. I shall write to the member for South Wales West with the information at that time. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Assembly library.

Complementary Therapies

Glyn Davies: What plans does Jane Hutt have to encourage the use of complementary therapies in the delivery of primary health care in Wales? (WAQ1062JS)

Jane Hutt: It is the responsibility of health authorities to provide services to meet the needs of the local population based on local priorities and available resources. Any use of complementary therapies by the NHS must be based on evidence that they are clinically effective.

I will be meeting representatives of the Complementary Therapies College of Wales this week to discuss complementary therapies and their use in the NHS.

Cot Death (Chemical Link)

Glyn Davies: What evidence is there that the presence of antimony or phosphorus is a factor in cot deaths and what research is available? (WAQ1074JS)

Jane Hutt: The Expert Group on Cot Death Theories was set up by the Government in 1994 to look at causal relationships between chemicals and cot deaths. It found that there was no evidence to suggest that antimony and phosphorus containing compounds used as fire retardants in PVC and other cot mattress materials are a cause of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The group's report, published in May 1998, contains a full review of research and their investigations in this area.

Wheelchairs in Residential Homes

Jenny Randerson: In order to cut down the residential 'home' inspection time for the provision of wheelchairs for residents, will Jane Hutt introduce a requirement for such homes to submit plans of any additions, extensions or other alterations to the building that may affect the recommended use of wheelchairs to the appropriate authorities? (WAQ1087JS)

Jane Hutt: I am concerned to know if there are delays in the issuing of wheelchairs in residential homes and will be monitoring this. Generally, a patient's assessment would be carried out at the residential home, avoiding the need for a separate visit.

It is my officials' view that the submission of plans showing building alterations would not assist in the environmental inspection procedure for residential homes, as such plans would not include all considerations taken into account during an inspection.

I am pleased to say that the Artificial Limb and Appliance Service who are responsible for the Wheelchair Service in Wales are currently working with the Specialised Health Services Commission for Wales to review the provision standards and processes for the issue of all wheelchairs in Wales and will be bringing a report to the Assembly in due course. The service was awarded a chartermark earlier this year.

I would be grateful if you could inform me of delays that you are aware of so that I can ensure that these are considered in the review.

Flint Community Hospital (Funding)

Alison Halford: What plans there are to make the necessary funding available for the continued operational status of Flint Community Hospital and ensure therefore that its services are developed in order to meet the need of its constituents? (WAQ1243VB)

Jane Hutt: The funding of services provided at Flint Community Hospital is a matter for North Wales Health Authority and North East Wales NHS Trust. The trust is pursuing a programme of upgrading existing services at the hospital and providing additional services, such as physiotherapy, to meet the needs and expectations of the people of Flint.

The Millennium Bug (Combating the Effect in Hospitals)

Alun Cairns: What preparations have been made to combat the effects of the 'Millennium Bug' in all hospitals and medical installations in Wales? (WAQ1089)

Jane Hutt: In 1996 all NHS organisations in Wales were instructed to establish projects to deal with millennium date change issues. This has been done and the Chief Executive of each organisation is accountable for the preparations. All projects have worked to a completion date of 30 September 1999. Additional guidance has been provided together with appropriate seminars and training in order for the service to undertake this work appropriately. Much work has been done on equipment compliance, contingency planning and business continuity planning by local organisations and this is now approaching completion across Wales. The supply chain to NHS organisations has also been scrutinised to ensure that delivery of all essential supplies will continue as normal. This has been supplemented by UK-wide work on such issues as medical device safety.

Finally, each health authority has been given responsibility for coordinating the plans for their area to ensure no material disruption to local services.

The Millennium Bug (Hospitals at Risk)

Alun Cairns: What steps has the Jane Hutt taken as a result of the report on the millennium bug issued in August this year by the House of Commons Select Committee which highlighted some Welsh hospitals as being 'at severe risk of disruption' and would she list those hospitals? (WAQ1095).

Jane Hutt: The Public Accounts Committee report was based upon information provided for the National Infrastructure Forum in April and correct at the end of March. There are now no organisations at risk of severe disruption.

The Millennium Bug (Minimising the Effects in Hospitals)

Alun Cairns: What efforts have been made, leading to the end of the year, to minimise the effect of the millennium bug within every hospital in Wales in light of the House of Commons committee report stating that 100 per cent of hospitals in Wales have been classed 'at risk of some disruption'? (WAQ1090)

Jane Hutt: Preparations for the millennium date change commenced in 1996. Substantial guidance has been issued to the NHS on all aspects of the issue, ranging from ensuring the compliance of equipment through contingencies for equipment failure to developing contingency plans to ensure continuity of patient services.

The target date for completion of preparations is 30 September 1999 and all NHS bodies are being assessed currently by the District Audit service to verify achievement of that target. Any organisation that fails to achieve this target will have to agree an action plan that clearly identifies how and when the organisation will achieve full preparedness. It is not anticipated that many, if any, organisations will not have achieved this target.

The report to the last national infrastructure forum stated that as at mid-June no NHS organisation in Wales had completed its preparations. Given the 30 September deadline, this was expected.

Questions to the Secretary for Education and Children (Rosemary Butler)

Infant Classes in Monmouth

David Davies: What progress has the Labour Government made since the election in reducing the size of infant classes in Monmouth? (WAQ1232VB)

Rosemary Butler: The January 1998 Schools Census showed that 927 pupils in Key Stage 1 (infant) pupils in Monmouthshire were in classes of over 30. The January 1999 Schools Census showed that 645 pupils were in classes of over 30, a reduction of 282 pupils. This reduction was achieved in the main by the use of £109,592 infant class size reduction grant from the Welsh Office for 1998-99.

Monmouthshire has been awarded a further £228,000 in infant class size reduction grant for 1999-2000. A primary school class size count was undertaken on 28 September across Wales to identify the impact of the 1999-2000 grant. The results should be available in early November.

Extending Nursery Provision

Jonathan Morgan: What plans does Rosemary Butler have to extend nursery provision to all three year olds in Wales? (WAQ1219VB)

Rosemary Butler: The Under-16 Education Committee, of which you are a member, is currently undertaking a review of education provision for three year olds in Wales as you know. The Committee is considering the current pattern of provision and will assess whether its expansion would be in the educational and developmental interests of children. Organisations with an interest in early years provision in Wales are being invited to contribute to the review through written and oral evidence. The Committee will submit its report to me early in the new year and I shall take very careful account of its recommendations in considering the way forward.

Over 50 per cent of three year olds in Wales already receive at least part-time early years education.

Proposed Welsh Baccalaureate (Pilot Scheme)

Jonathan Morgan: Does Rosemary Butler support a pilot scheme for the proposed Welsh Baccalaureate? (WAQ1218VB)

Rosemary Butler: As a member of the Under-16 Education Committee you will be aware that following the Qualifying for Success consultation we are already committed to a programme of reforms to post-16 qualifications that will introduce greater breadth and flexibility and strengthen vocational alternatives to A-levels. We will want to consider carefully how the Welsh Baccalaureate proposals sit alongside these reforms. In advance of that further work I believe it would be premature to come to any decision on a possible pilot associated with those proposals.

A Level Qualifications

Jonathan Morgan: Will Rosemary Butler reaffirm the Government's commitment to A level qualifications? (WAQ1220VB)

Rosemary Butler: I refer you to the answer I gave to WAQ1031, a copy of which is below.

Improved A Level Results

Jonathan Morgan: In light of the improved A Level results does Rosemary Butler agree that these qualifications represent the 'gold standard' in post-16 education. (WAQ1031)

Rosemary Butler: GCE A-levels have a deserved and long established reputation for high quality and standards. We are committed to maintaining the quality and rigour of all qualifications. The recent results represent an excellent achievement by students and their teachers. Alongside other qualifications, like GNVQs and NVQs, A-levels form a formidable suite of qualifications which are recognised and valued by employers and higher education.

The consultation paper 'Qualifying for Success' set out our plans to add breadth to post-16 studies by broadening A-levels and promoting vocational qualifications, underpinning them with rigorous standards and key skills. Following on from that consultation we will be introducing, from September 2000, new Advanced Subsidiary qualifications, revised A-levels and revised GNVQs, together with a new key skills qualification. These reforms will enable students to study broader programmes, combining academic and vocational studies, while maintaining rigour.

Local Education Authorities (Additional Money)

Jonathan Morgan: How much additional money has been made available to local education authorities since the Assembly came into being? (WAQ1221VB)

Rosemary Butler: Under the infant class size reduction scheme, £11.3 million has been paid to local education authorities and £669,950 has been paid under the National Grid for Learning Initiative. The sum of £120,000 has been agreed to support special education needs pilot projects and £13.276 million has been agreed to support school building improvement projects under the New Deal additional capital funding for schools programme

Questions to the Finance Secretary (Edwina Hart)

Savings in Quango Costs

Nick Bourne: Further to her response to WAQ730VB, will Edwina Hart give an estimate of the savings that she has indicated will be made in quango costs in future years from the wind-up of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, and other quango savings for the next four years? (WAQ1007VB)

Edwina Hart: Work is going on at present which will help to quantify these savings and figures for 2000-01. These figures will become available to Members at the end of the budget planning round.

Pierhead Building Restoration

Glyn Davies: Will Edwina Hart confirm what is the total cost to date of improvement and repairs to the Pierhead Building since it was decided to locate the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff Bay? (WAQ1102JS)

Edwina Hart: The Pierhead Building is a fine Victorian building which was in a state of poor repair when it was taken over by the Welsh Office in 1998 as a result of decisions by the then Secretary of State. It is a listed building and required careful restoration work. The estimated capital cost of repairs to the Pierhead Building is £870,000 excluding project management fees. Work is in hand to prepare the building for use by visiting schools and youth groups as part of the Assembly's programme of public access as announced by the First Secretary before the summer.

New Assembly Building (Location)

Glyn Davies: Will Edwina Hart confirm that a like-for-like comparison of costs of the Cardiff City Hall, the Bute Square and the Cardiff Bay options for the new Assembly building was put before the Secretary of State for Wales before he made his decision and will she make those figures public? (WAQ1099JS)

Edwina Hart: Yes. Not only were they considered by the Secretary of State for Wales in 1998 but the figures were carefully reviewed by the First Secretary before he sought the agreement of the Assembly in July for the proposal to go ahead with the new building. He also provided full details of the economic appraisal to other party leaders – including the leader of the Conservative Group of the Assembly – in advance of the debate. The economic appraisal of each of the three options was undertaken in accordance with the guidance set out in the Treasury publication 'Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government', known as 'Green Book' and considered by the Secretary of State for Wales before he made his decision. Such economic appraisals take account of both capital and running costs over a period of years, and establish for each option a single sum – the net present cost. The net present cost calculated at the time for each of the three options were:

Crickhowell House, Pierhead Building and Plot 1E	£43.9 million
Cardiff City Hall	£47.4 million
Bute Square	£52.5 million

The net present cost figures should not be confused with the building costs. The architect has confirmed that the concept design which won the competition can still be built for £12.5 million estimated at that time.

New Assembly Building (Cost)

Glyn Davies: Will Edwina Hart confirm the latest estimate of the cost of the new Assembly building? (WAQ1097JS)

Edwina Hart: The architect has confirmed that the competition design could still be built for £12.5 million. We are keeping a careful eye on costs which can be affected by the final design brief and subsequent design. A final brief is being prepared and detailed design will then be concluded.

Performance Related Pay

Jonathan Morgan: Further to her response to OAQ903VB, will Edwina Hart clarify what proportion of the £66 million will be spent on: a) the administration of performance related pay

including the cost of external assessors; b) rewarding teachers who meet the performance criteria?
(WAQ1340JS)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly has yet to take decisions about a number of issues related to the Green Paper and a detailed calculation is not possible at this stage. It is likely that the largest component would be the costs of increased teachers' pay which reflects the key role of teachers at the heart of the education system. Sufficient funds will be available to meet the costs of all the measures to be introduced.