

Answers issued to Members on 29 September 2008

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

[W] signifies that the question was tabled in Welsh.

Contents

- 2 Questions to the Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport
- 2 Questions to the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
- 3 Questions to the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing
- 6 Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Questions to the Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport

Nick Ramsay (Monmouth): Does the Welsh Assembly Government plan to proceed with the dualling of the A465 between Gilwern and Brynmawr, i.e. the Clydach Gorge? (WAQ52483)

Nick Ramsay (Monmouth): Will the Minister indicate in which year work is expected to commence on the dualling of the A465 between Gilwern and Brynmawr? (WAQ52484)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport (Ieuan Wyn Jones): An announcement on the dualling of the next section of the A465 will be made as soon as possible and as part of a review of current programmes.

Nick Ramsay (Monmouth): Will the Minister confirm that from the present time through to the completion of the dualling of the A465, there will remain a budget for its maintenance and renewal? (WAQ52496)

The Deputy First Minister: The Welsh Assembly Government in its role as Highway Authority for the Trunk Road and Motorway network in Wales is responsible for appropriate maintenance for all parts of that network. This includes the A465 whereby both new and old parts of it will be subject to normal maintenance regimes.

Questions to the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Andrew R.T. Davies (South Wales Central): How much money does the Welsh Assembly Government spend on post-19 education for young people with Profound Multiple Learning Difficulties and will the Minister state which institutions receive the funding? (WAQ52478)

The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Hutt): Funding is provided to Further Education Institutions (FEIs) as part of their general allocation for Post-19 learning. There is no specific sub allocation for learners with Profound Multiple Learning Difficulties.

An analysis of the 2006-07 data (our most up-to-date audited data) shows that the FEIs in the table below delivered activity to learners within the Subject Area entitled 'Foundations for Learning & Life—Independent Living Skills Profound' ; this is the category under which learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties would normally access learning.

Name of institution	Number of Learners
Barry College	338
Bridgend College	189
Coleg Ceredigion	59
Coleg Glan Hafren	329
Coleg Gwent	429
Coleg Llandrillo	605
Coleg Meirion Dwyfor	202
Coleg Menai	149
Coleg Morgannwg	1331
Coleg Powys	672
Coleg Sir Gar	119
Deeside College	33
Gorseinon College	208
Neath Port Talbot College	539

Pembrokeshire College	114
Swansea College	1054
Welsh College of Horticulture	243
Yale College	209
Ystrad Mynach College	213
Grand Total	7035

In addition to the funding made available to FEIs in Wales specific funding is provided by the Learner Support stream of the National Planning and Funding System (NPFS). In cases where the needs of learners with Profound Multiple Learning Difficulties cannot be met locally, specialist residential provision may be secured. Where the Assembly is satisfied that it cannot secure the provision of proper facilities (in the case of persons aged 16-18) or reasonable facilities (in the case of persons aged 19-25) for the education and training unless it also secures the provision of boarding accommodation, it must secure the provision of boarding accommodation. In such circumstances, the Assembly Government receives recommendations from Careers Wales for such learners to attend specialist residential college. Some of the learners supported by the Assembly Government to attend specialist residential provision have Profound Multiple Learning Difficulties. The placements will vary depending on the needs of each learner but, typically, the residential colleges where learners with Profound Multiple Learning Difficulties are placed include but are not limited to, the following:

National Star Centre, Cheltenham
 Hereward College, Coventry
 The David Lewis Centre, Cheshire
 Beechwood College, Sully, Vale of Glamorgan.

In 2007/08, 40 learners attended the above colleges at a cost to the Assembly Government of £1.747m. A number of the learners identified also received a contribution to their placement cost from the relevant Local Authority Social Services Department and/or Local Health Board.

Andrew R.T. Davies (South Wales Central): What plans does the Minister have to revise the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy 'Languages Count'? (WAQ52520)

Jane Hutt: Languages Count, the Welsh Assembly Government's foreign language strategy, was published in 2002. In line with the commitment in The Learning Country: Vision into Action we are taking stock of progress and plan to publish a refreshed strategy for consultation by Christmas 2008.

Questions to the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the Minister make a statement on when the Welsh Assembly Government intends to make an announcement on the private sewers transfer? (WAQ52489)

The Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing (Jane Davidson): My officials continue to work closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in considering the detailed and complex technical and legal issues which need to be addressed in developing a way forward on the transfer of private sewers.

The Assembly Government continues to attach considerable priority to keeping water and sewerage bills affordable, including for those on low incomes; minimising the burden on water and sewerage charges therefore continues to be an important factor in my consideration of how best to take forward the transfer of private sewers.

It is my intention to publish a Strategic Position Statement on Water to build on the aims and objectives of the Environment Strategy for Wales and set out the Assembly Government's ambitions and priorities for managing water and water services in Wales. We hope to consult on this by the end of the year.

Mick Bates (Montgomeryshire): What progress has been made towards the aims under the Microgeneration Action Plan for the installation of 30,000 new micro-generation heating and electricity units by 2012? (WAQ52490)

Jane Davidson: Our zero carbon ambition for new buildings and the way we are supporting the path to zero carbon by putting sustainability conditions on Assembly Government influenced projects and proposed revised planning guidance, is encouraging the installation of microgeneration units.

The focus of the National Energy Efficiency & Savings Plan will be on existing buildings and we will be exploring in the plan how to strengthen the role of microgeneration in the energy efficiency mix, including the feasibility of mainstreaming assistance for such units within the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme.

I announced to the Sustainability Committee before recess that Wales will be running a fuel poverty pilot project under the UK Government's Low Carbon Buildings Programme which will install microgeneration and renewable heating units in fuel poor households. We are currently finalising the details in order to tender for the delivery of the project. In terms of supporting the greening of existing jobs and supporting new green jobs, we are looking at this as part of our commitment to a green jobs strategy, which we plan to consult on this autumn. The strategy will encourage low carbon technologies, including microgeneration.

Mick Bates (Montgomeryshire): What action does the Minister have planned to assist vulnerable customers in Wales with their energy bills for this winter? (WAQ52491)

Jane Davidson: I support the Action Plan drawn up by Ofgem following the UK Fuel Poverty Summit earlier this year.

A key element is the need for all customers, particularly the vulnerable, who think they will have trouble paying their bills to discuss with their energy supplier as soon as possible what arrangements can be put in place to help.

I have endorsed a pilot scheme to ensure people contacting the Assembly Government's Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) are referred to their energy supplier for tariff advice so that they can maximise savings. Eaga, the HEES Scheme Manager, has managed the pilot and initial results indicate around 40% of the callers advised have switched to preferential tariffs.

The Assembly Government's 'Keep Well This Winter' information campaign, involving a range of referral agencies and other bodies, will reinforce this message, as well as offering other practical support and advice and links to relevant organisations.

I recognise that customers who think they will have difficulty paying their bills may be unhappy about contacting their energy supplier. I therefore support the UK Government's amendment of the Pensions Bill to allow appropriate data sharing with energy suppliers. Applying equally to Wales, this will provide energy suppliers with information to enable them to better identify and therefore better assist the most vulnerable, both in terms of offering information on the most appropriate tariffs, the availability of supplier hardship funds and targeting their Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) energy efficiency measures. I will do everything feasible to support the success of this measure in Wales, including looking at whether we can share HEES data.

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the Minister make a statement on extending support from the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme to help homeowners with the installation of secondary / double glazing? (WAQ52492)

Jane Davidson: Such glazing improvements are generally considered to be relatively cost ineffective in terms of energy efficiency, from the perspective of both energy bill and carbon savings.

However I am reviewing the energy efficiency measures available under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme as part of my overall review of the scheme under the National Energy Efficiency & Savings Plan and will look at glazing measures again in that context.

Mick Bates (Montgomeryshire): What improvements does the Welsh Assembly Government intend making for this winter to the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme programme? (WAQ52519)

Jane Davidson: I am examining the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme within the context of my review of our fuel poverty strategy under the National Energy Efficiency & Savings Plan. It is vital to ensure that any significant change to the scheme is based on robust evidence and subject to proper consultation.

Currently I do not plan to make any significant changes to the scheme this winter.

We will of course continue to monitor the delivery of the scheme closely, as we did last winter, to ensure that it focuses on and reacts to the most vulnerable, especially in relation to heating repairs.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister outline what discussions she has had regarding the Environment Agency's plans to build a flood protection barrier on the border of Powys and Shropshire? (WAQ52523)

Jane Davidson: I understand that the Environment Agency has no plans to build a flood protection barrier on the borders of Powys and Shropshire.

The Environment Agency is currently undertaking a viability study into a Severn Valley Flood Alleviation Scheme. The study is assessing the benefits of creating a dam and flood storage area north of Shrewsbury. It is understood that this flood alleviation option will not raise or impact on river and flood levels in Wales. The study is still at a preliminary stage and if progressed to the next stage will be subject to public consultation.

Eleanor Burnham (North Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on the quality of drinking water in North Wales and what steps are being taken to ensure that recent problems do not recur on such a regular basis? (WAQ52526)

Jane Davidson: There are currently no problems with the quality of drinking water in North Wales. On the 29 August 2008 Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water issued a boil water notice in Bangor, Bethesda, Capel Curig, Llanfai PG and the Menai Bridge areas as a precautionary measure. This notice was lifted on 18 September 2008.

The water company took this action in response to a change in risk information and after consultation with the relevant public health authorities. The boil water advice was a precautionary temporary measure whilst steps were taken to evaluate the risk by the multi agency incident management team. The independent Drinking Water Inspectorate was notified of this event and is carrying out an assessment of the cause and the actions taken by the water company. I will give careful consideration to the advice I receive from the Chief Inspector of Drinking Water following completion of this assessment.

From announcements made by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water it is publicly known that the company has installed an Ultra Violet treatment process at the Mynydd Llandygai water treatment works as a temporary measure to mitigate the risk of cryptosporidium presently in the source water. In addition the company has stated that it is in the process of accelerating a £9 million investment scheme for Mynydd Llandygai water treatment works. I am advised that this work should start early next year as part of a £150 million investment programme for 28 water treatment works across Wales. These improvements address risks identified by the company in respect of the source water quality. Until these improvements are fully in place short term measures to protect public health, including boil water notices, cannot be ruled out. Such operational decisions are for the water company within the drinking water quality risk management framework established with the National Public Health Service for Wales.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Mike German (South Wales East): Following the announcement by European Parliament on 5 June asking the council of Ministers to establish national plans to fight rheumatic diseases, bearing in mind the cost of failing to prevent rheumatic disease, what action is being taken? (WAQ52494)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Edwina Hart): In Wales we have developed a Chronic Conditions Model and Framework which sets out clear objectives for service planners and clinicians to improve services and support for those living with chronic conditions. We have also produced specific guidance on improving the care of people with Chronic Respiratory Conditions outlining ways in which services should be planned to improve prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and independent care of those living with such conditions across Wales.

Andrew R.T. Davies (South Wales Central): Will the Minister detail any set protocol that is used by the NHS Trusts and the Welsh Assembly Government following an unexplained death in Hospital? (WAQ52524)

Edwina Hart: All NHS Trusts are expected to have their own policies in place for dealing with unexplained deaths, complying with the requirements of HM Coroner, the Police and other processes. In addition, any unexplained death of a patient under the care of a health care professional must be reported to the Welsh Assembly Government under the serious incident reporting process.