

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 3 April 2001

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

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

Questions to the First Minister

Potential Implications of the Euro

Q9 Christine Gwyther: What discussions has the First Minister had with his ministerial colleagues at Westminster about the potential implications to Wales of the euro when it becomes fully operational in 2002? (OAQ10767)

The First Minister: I had discussions with ministerial colleagues at Westminster on this issue on 1 March, when I participated in a Joint Ministerial Committee on Europe. That meeting provided an opportunity for me to re-iterate the importance of this issue to employers, particularly in manufacturing, and those communities dependent on manufacturing employment in Wales, and to raise a number of practical issues relating to the five Welsh ports with ferry services to Ireland.

Review of Public Sector Ombudsmen Services

Q10 Alison Halford: What discussions has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for Wales over the proposed review of public sector ombudsmen services in Wales? (OAQ10773) *Withdrawn.*

State Aid Rules

Q11 Dafydd Wigley: What discussions has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding the implications for Wales of the UK Government and European Commission positions on state aid rules? (OAQ10760)

The First Minister: I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State on a range of matters. Most recently, the issue of state aid rules has been considered in the context of Corus and the unions' counter proposals to the closures and cutbacks announced on 1 February. Officials regularly liaise with the relevant Whitehall departments and the European Commission on the application of state aid rules and related policy developments.

Relations between Wales and Ireland

Q12 John Griffiths: What discussions did the First Minister have with the Taoiseach on his recent visit about developing relations between Wales and Ireland? (OAQ10782) *Withdrawn.*

Increasing Voter Awareness

Q13 Richard Edwards: What discussions has the First Minister had with his Westminster colleagues about developing ways of increasing voter awareness in Wales? (OAQ10768) *Withdrawn.*

European Meetings of Regions with Legislative Powers

Q14 Janet Davies: Will the First Minister report on the Assembly's involvement in the European meetings of regions with legislative powers? (OAQ10754)

The First Minister: I have twice attended meetings of European regional governments with legislative powers, in Brussels in September last year and in Barcelona in November. A further meeting is to be scheduled later this year, probably in Brussels. I presented a paper on the work of the network at the last meeting of the Committee on European Affairs on 31 January.

Business Rates Policy

Q15 Janet Ryder: Will the First Minister make a statement on how business rates policy is taken into consideration in his efforts to promote sustainable development and equality of opportunity in north Wales? (OAQ10772)

The First Minister: Business rates policy can play an important part in helping the Assembly to achieve some of its strategic targets, particularly in the context of delivering a better, stronger economy and better quality of life.

Ministerial Visits

Q16 Peter Black: What protocol does the First Minister operate in informing Assembly Members of ministerial visits that he makes to their constituencies and regions? (OAQ10771)

The First Minister: The protocol is that constituency Assembly Members and Members of Parliament are advised of all ministerial visits into their areas as a matter of routine.

Timing of a General Election

Q17 David Davies: Has the First Minister had any discussions with the Prime Minister regarding the timing of a general election and its effect on Wales? (OAQ10776)

The First Minister: No.

Co-ordination of Government Policy between Wales and the Rest of the UK

Q18 Ann Jones: What recent discussions has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for Wales on the co-ordination of Government policy between Wales and the rest of the UK? (OAQ10775)
Withdrawn.

Indirect Effects of Foot and Mouth Disease

Q19 Nick Bourne: How will the First Minister co-ordinate economic, agricultural and tourism policies to combat the indirect effects of outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in areas of rural Wales? (OAQ10779)

The First Minister: The Minister for Rural Affairs leads on the day-to-day co-ordination of the Assembly's response to the foot and mouth outbreak and the Deputy First Minister does likewise as regards the indirect effects.

Across the Assembly, Ministers and officials are working closely with their counterparts in the UK Government and those in Scotland and Northern Ireland to complement the National Assembly's internal decision processes in dealing with the impact of foot and mouth disease. That includes the vital contribution being made by the State Veterinary Service.

A senior official in the Agriculture Department leads a dedicated team, responsible for co-ordinating the input from the army, the Environment Agency, the State Veterinary Service and others, on operational issues relating to the slaughter and disposal of animals.

In addition, the Minister for Rural Affairs has convened a task and finish group drawn from the Wales Rural Partnership, including representatives of local authorities, the tourism and farming industries and other rural businesses. It is supported by key partners from the agri-food industry and its brief is to assess the implications of the outbreak and to prepare a plan to help relaunch the rural economy when the disease abates.

Better Co-ordinated and Sustainable Welsh Infrastructure

Q20 Brian Hancock: Will the First Minister make a statement about progress towards developing a better co-ordinated and sustainable Welsh infrastructure to support local communities and create a prosperous economy, as outlined in 'Betterwales.com'? (OAQ10765)

The First Minister: We are currently preparing to consult on our draft transport framework, the primary aim of which is to develop a better co-ordinated and sustainable transport infrastructure to support local communities and create a prosperous economy. We are also committed to preparing an energy framework strategy that will consider the economic development aspects, including infrastructure, of power supply throughout Wales. A range of activities is also underway to improve the telecommunications infrastructure.

These advances in infrastructure will complement the Communities First programme, which will aim to regenerate our communities and increase economic prosperity in the most deprived communities in Wales. All these issues will be prevalent in the final national economic development strategy.

Implementation of 'Putting Wales First'

Q21 Jonathan Morgan: Would the First Minister give a progress report on the implementation of 'Putting Wales First: A Partnership for the People of Wales'? (OAQ10778)

The First Minister: A statement on the progress towards implementing the partnership agreement commitments outlined in 'Putting Wales First' was made on 20 March 2001.

Foot and Mouth Disease (Co-ordinating Policy)

Q22 Elin Jones: Will the First Minister make a statement on how he is co-ordinating policy within all areas to deal with the foot and mouth outbreak and minimise financial losses to Wales? (OAQ10758)

The First Minister: The Minister for Rural Affairs leads on the day-to-day co-ordination of the Assembly's response to the foot and mouth outbreak and the Deputy First Minister does likewise as regards the indirect effects.

Across the Assembly, Ministers and officials are working closely with their counterparts in the UK Government and those in Scotland and Northern Ireland to complement the National Assembly's internal decision processes in dealing with the impact of foot and mouth disease. That includes the vital contribution being made by the State Veterinary Service.

A senior official in the Agriculture Department leads a dedicated team, responsible for co-ordinating the input from the army, the Environment Agency, the State Veterinary Service and others, on operational issues relating to the slaughter and disposal of animals.

The Deputy First Minister has announced a range of measures designed to help rural businesses, including tourist enterprises, cope with the impact of foot and mouth disease.

In addition, the Minister for Rural Affairs has convened a task and finish group drawn from the Wales Rural Partnership, including representatives of local authorities, the tourism and farming industries and other rural businesses. It is supported by key partners from the agri-food industry and its brief is to assess

the implications of the outbreak and to prepare a plan to help relaunch the rural economy when the disease abates.

Promoting Welsh-made Products

Q23 Janice Gregory: What plans does the First Minister have to promote Welsh-made products in retail outlets, particularly supermarkets, in Wales? (OAQ10770)

The First Minister: The Minister for Rural Affairs and I promote Welsh produce whenever possible. The National Assembly, the Welsh Development Agency Food Directorate and the agri-food partnership are working continuously to promote the agri-food strategy. Through the market channels programme, which was set up two years ago, the agri-food partnership is heavily involved in pursuing opportunities with all stores and supermarkets in Wales to promote and encourage the supply of locally-produced products. The programme has achieved major successes. For example, it has persuaded Tesco stores in Wales to more than double their supply of Welsh product lines to their customers. There has also been a significant increase in the number of Welsh lines stocked and promotional activities within Asda, Sainsbury's, Safeway and Somerfield stores.

Lamb and beef is also promoted by Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Limited. The success of its deal with Safeway for the introduction of branded Welsh mountain lamb in Safeway stores has resulted in the introduction earlier this year of branded Welsh beef, which I launched with them, into their stores.

Welsh products are promoted at agricultural shows, food fairs, and exhibitions in the UK and overseas, at farmers' markets and at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show.

Assembly Policies (South-east Wales)

Q24 William Graham: What discussions has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding the Assembly's policies and how they relate to south-east Wales? (OAQ10780)

The First Minister: I meet regularly with the Secretary of State for Wales to discuss all significant issues covering south-east Wales, and the whole of Wales.

Economic and Social Policies

Q25 Val Feld: Will the First Minister make a statement on the measures that the Assembly has taken to ensure that its economic and social policies benefit all of Wales? (OAQ10774) *Withdrawn.*

Community Participation

Q26 Cynog Dafis: What measures is the First Minister using to ensure that community participation is promoted in all areas of environmental, cultural and social policy? (OAQ10755)

The First Minister: The National Assembly supports a participative approach to making innovative policies and wants to see community participation in all areas of policy. Our commitment to this is outlined in the report 'Engaging Wales—Consultation and Participation'.

Achievements will be made by engaging in new ways with communities, as with the Communities First programme, which has consulted widely on its proposals for community regeneration. The environment development fund aims, through partnership, to develop and test new ways of achieving sustainable development in national parks, and projects supported by the fund must demonstrate that they have the genuine support or involvement of communities. Also, the recent Committee report, 'A Culture in Common', places at the heart of its vision the 'Betterwales.com' recommendations of extending access to, and awareness of, the Welsh language, culture, heritage and sporting opportunities.

European policy

Q27 Alun Cairns: Would the First Minister make a statement on the latest developments on European policy? (OAQ10769)

The First Minister: The Assembly is involved in a wide range of European policy across many fronts. On 1 March, I contributed to a Joint Ministerial Committee on Europe with colleagues from UK departments, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The European Commission has also published its White Paper on governance, which will have implications for the Assembly.

Social and Economic Assistance for Communities

Q28 Pauline Jarman: In his role as policy development co-ordinator, what is the First Minister doing to ensure that communities that most need social and economic assistance are receiving it? (OAQ10764)

The First Minister: The Assembly's ground-breaking programme, Communities First, will ensure that funding is directed at those communities most in need of social and economic assistance. Once identified as the most deprived communities in Wales, these areas will receive targeted funding from the various National Assembly programmes, as well as under Communities First.

Links between Wales and the Rest of Europe

Q29 Phil Williams: Can the First Minister make a statement on recent efforts to develop closer links between Wales and the rest of Europe? (OAQ10762)

The First Minister: The Chair's report, which I present to each meeting of the Committee on European Affairs, provides an update on a range of issues affecting Wales's relationship with the rest of Europe. The report highlights recent events that have allowed us to develop and enhance our links with Europe. For example, only last week we hosted a visit from senior politicians and officials from the region of Skane in Sweden.

From Monday 2 April, the creation of the European and External Affairs Directorate, which brings together the functions of the European Affairs Division, the international relations unit and WalesTrade International will help to strengthen the Assembly's capacity to input to the development of European Union policy.