

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 3 May 2001

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

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

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Questions to the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economic Development

Corus

Q6 Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement on the latest position with regard to Corus? (OAQ11115)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economic Development (Michael German): Discussions between Corus and the trade unions are continuing. A further meeting is scheduled for today.

Developing Economic Policy (Sustainable Development)

Q7 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: What steps has the Minister taken to ensure that economic policy is developed within the overarching framework of the sustainable development scheme? (OAQ11123)

Michael German: The sustainable development scheme provides the overarching framework for all the Assembly's work. The principles of sustainable development must be mainstreamed into the way in which the Assembly operates, including all economic policy.

Regular consultation with the sustainable development division within the Assembly and external organisations, such as Wales Wildlife and Countryside Link, will continue in all economic policy matters, to ensure consistency. We will continue to look for opportunities to capitalise on the growing demand for sustainable technologies, products and processes.

The Tourist Industry in Preseli Pembrokeshire

Q8 Richard Edwards: Will the Minister make a statement on any specific measures in place to help the tourist industry in Preseli Pembrokeshire? (OAQ11091)

Michael German: The Wales Tourist Board has provided a budget of £250,000 to support marketing initiatives from the 12 marketing areas in Wales, one of which is Pembrokeshire. The board intends to support its marketing proposals on a 50:50 basis, subject to budget availability.

The WTB will make an announcement shortly.

Mobile Telephone Companies

Q9 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on his discussions with mobile telephone companies located in Wales? (OAQ11139)

Michael German: Four mobile telephone operators currently offer services in Wales, namely One 2 One, Vodafone, BT Cellnet and Orange. I plan to meet One 2 One in the near future and, when I next meet BT, I will discuss, among other things, the work of BT Cellnet. Furthermore, my officials are in contact with the four operators on day-to-day operational issues. They have also met the new third generation operator, Hutchinson 3G, to discuss the company's possible activities in Wales in the future.

Awarding Energy Contracts

Q10 Pauline Jarman: Will the Minister provide a statement of guidelines that exist to ensure that Welsh expertise is reflected in awarding energy contracts? (OAQ11129)

Michael German: National Assembly procurement rules do not allow for preferential treatment of any supplier and are driven by value-for-money principles. The commercial environment for energy services is intensely competitive, but I am pleased to say that Welsh expertise in all aspects of the energy industry is widely recognised throughout the UK and beyond.

Employment Policies (European Commission Guidelines)

Q11 Elin Jones: When did the Minister last receive an update on European Commission guidelines for employment policies? (OAQ11126) *Withdrawn.*

Inward Investment Promotion

Q12 Jocelyn Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the impact of the current economic slowdown in the United States on inward investment promotion by the Welsh Development Agency? (OAQ11130) *Withdrawn.*

Job Losses in Gorseinon

Q13 Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement on measures that he is taking to deal with job losses in the Gorseinon area of Swansea? (OAQ11114)

Michael German: Despite the recent job losses in west Wales, the National Assembly and its partners in Team Wales continue to promote Wales as a country with a robust industrial infrastructure, excellent communication links, a flexible workforce and a positive business climate. We endeavour to attract new investment, but with an emphasis on projects requiring higher skill levels and paying higher wages. Alongside that, we are also committed to developing indigenous existing Welsh businesses, ensuring that we secure a balance of inward and indigenous investment, with a mixture of projects throughout Wales, and ensuring that we do not rely too heavily on one particular sector.

In relation to the job losses at Valeo, Team Wales is in contact with the company to offer full support to staff affected by the announcement. The Welsh Development Agency is marketing the site and staff as a going concern via its extensive property database. If successful, that could mean little or no redundancies.

However, if that does not come to fruition, Education and Learning Wales, through its training budgets, will provide support for people who have lost their jobs in a significant redundancy situation. The Employment Service can also provide rapid response measures. Those measures will be tailored to the particular circumstances and location of the redundancy situation and could include careers advice and guidance, immediate help with gaining new skills and new employment (with assistance to cover additional travel costs if employment is found outside the home area), childcare provision and help with

starting up in business. Those affected by such job losses may have access to the measures prior to a redundancy taking place.

A further statement will be made on the Corus situation.

Economic Inactivity (Men Aged 60 to 64)

Q14 Helen Mary Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the economic inactivity of men aged 60 to 64 in former coal mining areas in Wales? (OAQ11125) *Withdrawn.*

Tourism Industry (Foot and Mouth Disease)

Q15 David Lloyd: Will the Minister report on any discussions that he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on the medium to long-term impact of foot and mouth disease on the Welsh tourism industry? (OAQ11131) *Withdrawn.*

Economic Inactivity (Men Aged 50 and Over)

Q16 Helen Mary Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the economic inactivity of men aged 50 and over in former coal mining areas? (OAQ11136) *Withdrawn.*

Future Prospects for the Welsh Tourism Industry

Q17 Elin Jones: Will the Minister report on any discussions that he has had with Secretary of State for Wales on future prospects for the Welsh tourism industry? (OAQ11137) *Withdrawn.*

Administering European Funds

Q18 Richard Edwards: Will the Minister make a statement on his working relationship with the bodies responsible for administering European funds? (OAQ11092) *Withdrawn.*

The Tourism Industry's Workforce

Q19 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister launch any new initiatives to ensure that the Welsh tourism industry has a highly motivated, well-trained and adaptable workforce? (OAQ11096)

Michael German: The Tourism Training Forum for Wales is already working to develop an integrated education and training development policy for the benefit of the industry at large. Discussions are taking place between the Wales Tourist Board and Education and Learning Wales, with a view to strengthening the forum's role.

The Steel Industry

Q20 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement on the latest position regarding the steel industry in Wales? (OAQ11116) *Withdrawn.*

Apprenticeship Schemes

Q21 Pauline Jarman: Will the Minister make a statement on the availability and take-up of apprenticeship schemes in Wales, compared with other nations or regions of the United Kingdom? (OAQ11134) *Withdrawn.*

Economic Inactivity (Men Over 50)

Q22 David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on the economic inactivity of men aged over 50 in Wales? (OAQ11124) *Withdrawn.*

Developing Economic Policy (Sustainable Development)

Q23 Janet Ryder: How will the Minister ensure that economic policy is being developed within the overarching framework of the sustainable development scheme? (OAQ11121) *Withdrawn.*

The Welsh Economy (Foot and Mouth Disease)

Q24 Nick Bourne: What plans will the Minister put in place to help the Welsh economy recover from the damage caused by the foot and mouth disease crisis? (OAQ11095)

Michael German: The National Assembly has provided a wide range of immediate support to help businesses hit by foot and mouth disease. In addition, I chair, jointly with the Minister for Rural Affairs, a task and finish group established under the rural partnership and supported by the agri-food sector. The group has been asked to assess the economic impact of foot and mouth disease and propose practical measures to aid recovery.

The key sectors that the group's report is expected to cover are: farming and the agri-food sector, tourism, other rural businesses, rural skills and rural stress.

Finance Wales

Q25 Christine Gwyther: Will the Minister make a statement on the delivery mechanism for Finance Wales? (OAQ11094) *Withdrawn.*

Objective 1 (North Wales)

Q26 Anne Jones: Will the Minister make a statement about the progress in taking forward Objective 1 projects in north Wales over recent months? (OAQ11112)

Michael German: Further to the answer given on 15 March (OAQ10304), another 10 European regional development fund projects focusing on north Wales have been approved, with a grant value of over £5.5 million. The total number of ERDF projects approved to date is 23, representing grant value of over £14.5 million.

In addition, many projects will deliver throughout the Objective 1 region.

The Economy of South-East Wales

Q27 David Davies: What new measures is the Minister proposing to help the economy of south-east Wales recover from the job losses at Corus and the effects of the foot and mouth disease eradication programme? (OAQ11111)

Michael German: A further meeting is scheduled for today between Corus and the trade unions, and it would be inappropriate to comment on recovery plans at this point. In addition to the present package of financial assistance and relief for business and tourist enterprises affected by the foot and mouth disease outbreak, which I have announced, the rural task and finish group is helping to produce plans for the relaunch of the rural economy throughout Wales. Those will aid recovery and promote restructuring and growth in the rural parts of south-east Wales affected by the outbreak.

Fuel Poverty Programme

Q28 Cynog Dafis: Will the Minister report on the extent to which the Assembly, in delivering the fuel poverty programme, has harnessed Welsh expertise and infrastructure? (OAQ11128) *Withdrawn.*

Quantum Computing

Q29 Phil Williams: Will the Minister explain the potential for quantum computing as a growth sector in the Welsh economy, as suggested in the national economic development strategy consultation document? (OAQ11127) *Withdrawn.*

Tourism (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire)

Q30 Christine Gwyther: Will the Minister make a statement on any specific measures in place to help tourism in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire? (OAQ11093) *Withdrawn.*

Questions on Finance to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

Relief Package for Businesses

Q2 David Davies: Will the Minister explain how the relief package for businesses was allocated to local authorities in Wales? (OAQ11156) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): As I explained to the Assembly when introducing the Local Government Finance (Wales) Special Grant Report (No.7) (Wales) 2001 on 5 April, the figures reflect our best estimates of the types, numbers and size of businesses that are most likely to be affected, based on data provided by the Valuation Office Agency. We have targeted the greatest share of the grant to those areas hardest hit.

Rate Relief Measures (Foot and Mouth Disease)

Q4 Christine Gwyther: Will the Minister give a progress report on rate relief measures for businesses in Wales affected by the foot and mouth disease outbreak? (OAQ11105) *Transferred for written answer.*

Edwina Hart: Following approval of the Local Government Finance (Wales) Special Grant Report (No.7) (Wales) 2001 on 5 April, the additional money was paid to councils on 25 April. It is now for them to decide how they can make most effective use of the money, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Special Grant Report. My officials are monitoring the situation and I will review the position after three months.

Questions 5 to 7 were answered in Plenary.

Police Funding

Q8 Owen John Thomas: What talks has the Minister had with the Westminster Government regarding police funding in Wales? (OAQ11089)

Edwina Hart: I talk regularly with UK Ministers on various matters, including funding for the police and local government more generally.

Barnett Formula (Review)

Q9 Ieuan Wyn Jones: What discussions has the Minister had with the UK Government regarding a review of the Barnett formula? (OAQ11144)

Edwina Hart: None. However, I keep the operation of the Barnett formula and its impact on the Welsh block under constant review.

Non-identifiable Total Managed Expenditure

Q10 Phil Williams: What discussions has the Minister had with the UK Treasury through the Secretary of State for Wales regarding the Welsh share of non-identifiable total managed expenditure? (OAQ11149)

Edwina Hart: Non-identifiable expenditure is not a devolved issue. However, my officials are in touch with the UK Government regularly about matters that concern Wales.

Barnett Formula (Review)

Q11 Elin Jones: Will the Minister report on any discussions that she has had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding a review of the Barnett formula during the life of the National Assembly for Wales? (OAQ11162) *Withdrawn.*

Barnett Formula (Discussions)

Q12 Alun Pugh: Has the Minister had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales and other UK Ministers about the Barnett formula? (OAQ11151)

Edwina Hart: I meet the Secretary of State for Wales from time to time and we discuss a range of financial issues affecting Wales, including the operation of the Barnett formula and its impact on the Welsh block. I have not discussed the issue with other members of the UK Government.

Guidance on Payments to Consultants

Q13 David Lloyd: Has the Minister issued any guidance to Assembly-funded bodies regarding payments to consultants? (OAQ11145) *Withdrawn.*

Additional Funding for Areas Undergoing Major Structural Change

Q14 Ieuan Wyn Jones: What discussions has the Minister had with the UK Treasury through the Secretary of State for Wales regarding additional funding for areas undergoing major structural change? (OAQ11143) *Withdrawn.*

Changes to the Barnett Formula

Q15 David Davies: What discussions has the Minister had with the Deputy Prime Minister regarding changes to the Barnett formula? (OAQ11157)

Edwina Hart: None.

The Treasury's 'Statistical Analyses 2001-02'

Q16 Cynog Dafis: What discussions has the Minister had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding any implications for Wales of the Treasury's 'Statistical Analyses 2001-02'? (OAQ11147) *Withdrawn.*

Unpredictable Events or Situations (Budget Flexibility)

Q17 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister report on the flexibility of the National Assembly's budget in dealing with unexpected demands in response to unpredictable events or situations? (OAQ11088)

Edwina Hart: For the current financial year, the addition of an extra £32.5 million to the Assembly's budget following the Chancellor's budget in March, together with prudent budget management and use of unspent and uncommitted resources from the last financial year (2000-01), has provided some flexibility to meet unexpected demands. For future years, the Assembly's budget approved on 29 March 2001 currently provides for a reserve in 2002-03 and 2003-04 of £97 million and £153 million respectively to meet unplanned financial pressures.

Cut in Planned UK Public Spending

Q18 Ann Jones: What assessment has the Minister made of the consequences for the Assembly's budget of a £16 billion cut in planned UK public spending? (OAQ11155) *Withdrawn.*

Spending on Consultants' Services

Q19 Brian Hancock: How much has been allocated for Assembly spending on consultants' services during the current financial year? (OAQ11146) *Withdrawn.*

Impact of the Budget on the Assembly's Finances

Q20 Peter Black: What impact has the budget had on the Assembly's finances? (OAQ11154)

Edwina Hart: The provision of an additional £100 million over three years is a boost to the Assembly's budget.

Barnett Formula (Discussions)

Q21 Glyn Davies: When did the Minister last discuss the Barnett formula with the Secretary of State for Wales? (OAQ11107)

Edwina Hart: I meet the Secretary of State for Wales from time to time and we discuss a range of financial issues affecting Wales, including the operation of the Barnett formula and its impact on the Welsh block.

Implications of Budgetary Measures

Q22 Richard Edwards: Will the Minister make a statement on the implications of the budgetary measures recently announced by Gordon Brown for Wales? (OAQ11103) *Withdrawn.*

Financing the Assembly's Priorities

Q23 Peter Black: What additional money is available to finance the Assembly's priorities as a result of the budget? (OAQ11153)

Edwina Hart: The Chancellor has made an extra £100 million available to the Assembly over three years: £32.515 million in 2001-02, £34.191 million in 2002-03, and £33.111 million in 2003-04.

Responsibility for Corporate Planning

Q24 Ann Jones: How does the Minister discharge her responsibility for corporate planning in the Assembly? (OAQ11109)

Edwina Hart: Within the Cabinet, responsibility for strategic policy co-ordination rests with the Minister for Assembly Business. I contribute to the corporate planning process in a number of ways, both as a Minister with a specific policy remit and by virtue of my responsibilities for the Assembly's budget planning. To ensure an integrated approach to the Assembly's financial and strategic planning, the budget planning round now links financial allocations to policy results.

Rate Relief Measures (Foot and Mouth Disease)

Q25 Richard Edwards: Will the Minister give an update on rate relief measures for business in Wales affected by the foot and mouth disease epidemic? (OAQ11102) *Withdrawn.*

National Botanic Garden of Wales

Q26 Phil Williams: Will the Minister state what financial assistance is available from the National Assembly for Wales's budget for the National Botanic Garden of Wales? (OAQ11163) *Withdrawn.*

Remuneration and Expenses of Chairs and Members of Public Bodies

Q27 Alison Halford: Will the Minister make a statement on her review into the remuneration and expenses of chairs and members of public bodies? (OAQ11101)

Edwina Hart: I refer you to my written statement issued on 10 January 2001. We are now consulting externally on remuneration, following which we shall formulate a set of proposals. I have made a commitment that I shall consult Assembly Committees on those proposals before seeking endorsement in Plenary for a final package later this year.

Special Funding (Foot and Mouth Disease)

Q28 Elin Jones: What discussions has the Minister had with the UK Treasury through the Secretary of State for Wales regarding special funding for regeneration of areas that have been badly affected by the foot and mouth disease crisis? (OAQ11142) *Withdrawn.*

Changes to Assembly Financing

Q29 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister report on any discussions that she has had with the UK Treasury about any changes to Assembly financing? (OAQ11090)

Edwina Hart: None, although my officials are in regular contact with the Treasury about in-year changes to the Assembly's budget.

Special Funding (Steel Industry)

Q30 Janet Davies: What discussions has the Minister had with the UK Treasury through the Secretary of State for Wales regarding special funding for regeneration of areas that are heavily dependent on the steel industry? (OAQ11148) *Withdrawn.*