

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 4 December 2002

[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 Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language

Badminton in Wales

Q6 Mick Bates: What measures are being taken to promote and encourage badminton in Wales? (OAQ20814) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language (Jenny Randerson): The Sports Council for Wales works closely with the Welsh Badminton Union to promote and encourage badminton in Wales. Last year, £400,000 was made available to the sport. Regional development officers are based in north and south Wales, and there are 12 badminton centres of excellence across Wales.

Millennium Stadium

Q7 Glyn Davies: What discussions has the Minister had with the Welsh Rugby Union about the long-term future of the Millennium Stadium? (OAQ20818) *Transferred for written answer.*

Jenny Randerson: I met with the chairman of Millennium Stadium plc and the Welsh Rugby Union, Glanmor Griffiths, in March this year to discuss the stadium's financial situation. I explained the Welsh Assembly Government's position then, as I did again when he appeared before the Culture Committee earlier this month.

While the Assembly Government cannot provide a grant for something that has already been built, we would consider the merits of any fully argued business case that provided complete and transparent financial details of the organisation involved.

Question 8 (OAQ20832) was answered in Plenary.

Lottery Money

Q9 Janet Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the way in which the Assembly Government can ensure that lottery money is used to support the Government's priorities? (OAQ20846)

Jenny Randerson: I made a statement in Plenary on 13 November setting out my aim that all lottery funding streams in Wales have a clear Welsh direction. I have also sent the views of the Welsh Assembly Government, as supported in Plenary, to Ministers at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the joint review of lottery funding, seeking greater devolution of powers in relation to the distribution of lottery funding.

Contemporary Art in Wales

Q10 Phil Williams: How is the Minister promoting talent in contemporary art in Wales? (OAQ20844)

Jenny Randerson: My Culture Strategy, 'Creative Future: Cymru Greadigol' deals directly with contemporary art issues. The Arts Council of Wales administers a number of new funding schemes that address the promotion of talent in contemporary art. The most relevant is Creative Wales, a professional development scheme with a budget of £250,000, which offers practitioners across the artform spectrum a grant of up to £25,000 to spend a concentrated period of time developing their practice.

Encouraging Regular Sporting Activity

Q11 Peter Black: What is being done to encourage more people to take up a regular sporting activity? (OAQ20805)

Jenny Randerson: Measures are already in place. A physical education in schools sport plan is in place, which will see £5 million being invested in school sport over the next three years. This will help stimulate and co-ordinate more and better school sport in Wales. Moreover, an action plan has been prepared, based on the recommendations put forward by the healthy and active lifestyle taskforce. Along with the Minister for Health and Social Services, I fully support the plan, which aims to encourage more active daily living and complements the work of the Sports Council for Wales.

Cardiff Sports Village

Q12 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on progress on the proposed Cardiff sports village? (OAQ20835)

Jenny Randerson: The proposed Cardiff sports village is primarily a matter for Cardiff County Council.

Increasing the Market for Welsh Artists

Q13 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement on progress in increasing the market in Wales for the work of Welsh artists? (OAQ20803)

Jenny Randerson: 'Creative Future: Cymru Greadigol' acknowledges that we must respect individual artistic endeavour as we would any other professional contribution to our society. It also says that we should assist artists to find studio spaces, bursaries and commissions and to improve the interaction between artists, designers and crafts outlets. From the grant in aid that the Welsh Assembly Government provides to the Arts Council of Wales, the council operates the highly successful Collectorplan. This is an interest-free purchasing loan from £50 to £2,000 to encourage more people to buy original works of art and craft from galleries across Wales. Almost £471,000 has already been loaned this year.

Young People in the Arts

Q14 Eleanor Burnham: What is being done to encourage the participation of young people in the arts? (OAQ20812)

Jenny Randerson: My Culture Strategy, 'Creative Future: Cymru Greadigol' recognises the vital importance of engaging young people and providing them with opportunities to participate in the arts. The 'Laying the Foundations' action plan is dedicated to young people. I have asked the Arts Council of Wales to establish a youth arts fund, and to increase the number of pilot youth arts strategies across Wales. The fund will be launched shortly. In addition, I am making almost £1.2 million available over three years for the arts council for the development of theatre for young people.

Office of Communications

Q15 Kirsty Williams: What representations has the Minister made to the UK Government with regard to ensuring an influential and powerful Welsh voice at Ofcom? (OAQ20838)

Jenny Randerson: The Assembly Government consulted widely on the draft Communications Bill and our formal response was debated both within Committee and Plenary sessions, with a Plenary resolution accepted by all four parties.

I have also had discussions with Tessa Jowell, the UK Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Dr Kim Howells, the UK Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting and Don Touhig, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales. I have used each discussion to highlight the specific issues raised in the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the draft Communications Bill and to explain the views and concerns of the Assembly Government, on the proposals relating to Ofcom.

Questions to the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Rural Development and Wales Abroad

Export of Live Animals

Q8 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the export of live animals? (OAQ20892)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Rural Development and Wales Abroad (Michael German): The export of live farm animals is a legal trade, subject to compliance with the rules on journey times and health certification.

Cig Coch Cymru

C9 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: A wnaiff y Gweinidog adrodd ar y cynnydd sydd wedi ei wneud ar sefydlu corff newydd ar gyfer hyrwyddo cig coch Cymru? (OAQ20860) [W]

Michael German: Mae'r pum darpar bartner wedi gwneud llawer o waith i sefydlu corff cig coch newydd yng Nghymru. Mae pedwar o'r partneriaid hynny eisoes wedi cadarnhau y byddant yn ymuno â'r corff newydd, ac mae'r pumed partner yn ymgynghori â'i aelodau cyn penderfynu. Mae'r trafodaethau yn mynd rhagddynt ac mae cynrychiolwyr y pum partner yn rhan ohonynt.

Welsh Red Meat

Q9 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will the Minister give a progress report on establishing a new body to promote Welsh red meat? (OAQ20860) [W]

Michael German: Much work has been done by all five prospective partners to progress the establishment of a new red meat body in Wales. Four of the five prospective partners have already confirmed their commitment to joining the new body while the fifth is to consult its members before reaching a decision. Negotiations are continuing at which all five partners are represented.

Links with Other National Governments

Q10 Brian Gibbons: What is the Minister doing to promote and co-ordinate links with other national governments? (OAQ20886)

Michael German: Developing links with other national and regional governments, on a bilateral and multilateral basis, makes a key contribution to raising the profile and increasing the influence of Wales on

the international stage, as well as being mutually beneficial. We are looking increasingly to develop these links within a strategic framework.

Tir Gofal Agreements

Q11 Glyn Davies: How many Tir Gofal agreements have been signed? (OAQ20872)

Michael German: A total of 1,178 Tir Gofal agreements have been signed to date.

20-day Rule

Q12 Eleanor Burnham: Has the Minister discussed policy comparisons and contrasts in regard to the 20-day rule with other devolved administrations? (OAQ20878)

Michael German: I discuss these issues regularly at inter-ministerial meetings of UK Ministers for agriculture.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Q13 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the reassessment of nitrate vulnerable zones? (OAQ20887) *Transferred for written answer by the Minister for Environment.*

The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex): Following an extensive public consultation exercise on the Welsh Assembly Government's proposals, new nitrate vulnerable zones were designated in September under the Protection of Water Against Agricultural Nitrate Pollution (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2002, bringing the coverage to less than 3 per cent of Wales. The regulations also introduced a statutory process enabling affected landowners and farmers to require the Assembly to reassess whether their land warrants inclusion in the new zones. A notice has been placed in newspapers advising of the reassessment system and of where very detailed maps of the new zones can be examined. The deadline for the Welsh Assembly Government to receive reassessment requests is 17 December.

Safety across Farms

Q14 Ann Jones: What assessment has been made of the current pilot schemes for the use of roving safety representatives in the countryside to help bolster safety across all farms? (OAQ20898)

Michael German: The roving safety representative pilots within the agriculture sector will evaluate the effectiveness of trade-union-appointed representatives. Comparison will be made with that of independent safety consultants operating with samples of volunteer participating farmers, and both will be compared against a control group where no special arrangements are being made to provide health and safety advice. The project is scheduled to run until mid 2004 with a report being submitted to the Health and Safety Commission's agricultural industry advisory committee later that year.

Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy

Q15 Kirsty Williams: What steps has the Minister taken with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to maximise the potential benefit for Wales of reform of the common agricultural policy? (OAQ20879)

Michael German: I meet the Secretary of State regularly to discuss a range of issues of direct relevance to farming in Wales, including the reshaping of the common agricultural policy. My key objective is to ensure that we secure the best possible outcome for Wales and Welsh farmers.

More specifically, my officials and I are fully involved in key London discussions aimed at progressing the UK Government's negotiating position on the mid-term review of CAP. In addition, we are directly

involved in discussions at Brussels to influence the European Commission's evolving thinking on the future direction of CAP. I attended the EU agriculture council meeting in Brussels last week and met Commissioner Franz Fischler, with the Secretary of State.

We will not know the detail of the CAP reform proposals until late January when the commission is expected to publish draft legislative texts.

Questions on Open Government to the Business Minister

Rules and Guidance on Procurement

Q4 Peter Black: Will the Minister review Assembly rules and guidance on procurement so as to achieve maximum openness on why decisions are taken on methods of financing? (OAQ20771) *Transferred for written answer by the Finance Minister.*

The Finance Minister (Edwina Hart): Guidance covering the Assembly's procurement policy is freely available on the Assembly's website, where it is regularly updated to reflect best practice. Decisions regarding the appropriate method of financing are based on a value-for-money analysis.

Question 5 (OAQ20796) was answered in Plenary.

Human Rights Issues

Q6 Jocelyn Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on measures that he has taken to promote awareness of human rights issues in Wales? (OAQ20799)

The Business Minister (Carwyn Jones): Together with the Lord Chancellor's Department, we hosted two successful human rights roadshows this year, in Cardiff in April and in Llandudno in November. Participants included public bodies and other organisations, including citizens advice bureaux and voluntary groups. We have a continuing commitment to raising awareness of the Human Rights Act 1998, and these roadshows will stimulate further networking and the sharing of good practice among public bodies in Wales.

Questions 7 (OAQ20800), 8 (OAQ20783) and 9 (OAQ20794) withdrawn.

Work and Proceedings of the Assembly

Q10 Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister make a statement in involving people from all regions of Wales in the work and proceedings of the Assembly? (OAQ20774)

Carwyn Jones: Ministers regularly visit all parts of Wales to discuss their work and to listen to people's concerns. The Cabinet held its first open-mike session in Llandudno in July, and the Assembly Government had a presence at this summer's major Welsh shows and festivals. We are intending to hold further open-mike sessions in west Wales and the Valleys.

Assembly Intranet/Internet Websites

Q11 David Ian Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on the user-friendliness of the Assembly intranet/internet websites? (OAQ20792)

Carwyn Jones: In relation to the National Assembly's internet site, I refer you to the answer that I gave to Brian Gibbons's question 3 (OAQ20788) earlier today. As far as our internal intranet is concerned, officials are aware of the need to improve its accessibility. The answer lies in applying software to it, to

deliver a content management solution. Consideration is being given to obtaining such an application as part of the Merlin project that is to replace OSIRIS.

Information Technology Facilities

Q12 Phil Williams: Can the Minister make a statement on how information technology facilities within the National Assembly can be used to promote open government? (OAQ20769)

Carwyn Jones: All Assembly Members and officials are accessible by e-mail. There is an open publishing policy to place all public documents on our website. Electronic consultations and discussion forum are common practice. The Assembly was the first UK legislature to publish Cabinet minutes online and the Assembly's Record of Proceedings is only published electronically.

Muslim Community

Q13 Helen Mary Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the ways in which the National Assembly Government consults with the Muslim community? (OAQ20785)

Carwyn Jones: An inter-faith council has been established in order to facilitate discussion between politicians and all of the major faiths in Wales. I have also recently met the Muslim women's organisation the All Wales Saheli Association, and visited its offices.

I would like to take this opportunity to condemn the recent spate of abuse and attacks levelled against Muslims in Swansea during the month of Ramadan. Such behaviour cannot be tolerated and works against our aim of creating an inclusive and diverse Wales.

Open Government

Q14 Jonathan Morgan: What targets have been set to measure the Welsh Assembly Government's performance in open government? (OAQ20772)

Carwyn Jones: Our Code of Practice on Public Access to Information sets out the principles by which we operate. Our target is the promotion of the greater interest and understanding of government by people in Wales.

Commercially Confidential Information

Q15 Alison Halford: Will the Minister prove his commitment to open government by imparting information classed as 'commercially confidential' to Assembly Members either via confidential briefings to Subject or Standing Committees or on 'privy council' terms, when called upon to do so? (OAQ20798)

Carwyn Jones: The Welsh Assembly Government is fully committed to open government. I share the view, however, that there are circumstances in which it would be potentially harmful to disclose certain categories of information. The Code of Practice on Public Access to Information lists, in line with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, categories of information that are exempt from disclosure. Information relating to commercial interests whose disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the holder of the information) is one such category. Disclosure relating to commercial interests could also constitute a breach of confidence. The Code of Practice on the Provision of Information to Assembly Members states that Members will not normally have access to information that is commercially confidential.

If the National Assembly is to achieve best value through open competition for the goods and services that it procures, I believe it is important that the principle of maintaining commercial confidentiality should remain, and I do not propose to change the existing groundrules. The question of the extent to

which commercial information should be treated as being in confidence needs to be considered in light of individual circumstances.