

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 5 June 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 First Minister

Public Accountability (Cabinet)

Q15 Gareth Jones: What are the First Minister's plans to increase the public accountability of his Cabinet? (OAQ11799) *Withdrawn.*

The Future of the National Assembly

Q16 Peter Black: What discussions has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for Wales about the proposals for the future of the National Assembly for Wales? (OAQ11754)

The First Minister: I have frequent discussions with the Secretary of State about this and other matters.

The Assembly's Impact on North Wales

Q17 Peter Rogers: Will the First Minister make an assessment of the impact of the Assembly on north Wales after its first two years? (OAQ11751)

The First Minister: The Assembly has worked in north Wales, as it is has throughout Wales, to tackle social disadvantage, ensure equality of opportunity for all and create a sustainable future for Wales. Over the last two years, we have made significant investments in improving our services in north Wales, in particular:

- Regional selective assistance has been channelled to create and secure jobs in St Asaph, Deeside, Bangor and Broughton;
- A55 is now open as a transport and information communication technology link;
- The Assembly is funding a direct passenger service between north and south Wales.

I will continue, in my role as Minister for the North, to ensure that the region is properly represented and benefits fully from the good progress that the Assembly is making.

Promoting Indigenous Businesses (Partnership with Business)

Q18 William Graham: Will the First Minister make a statement concerning the promotion of indigenous business within the partnership with business scheme? (OAQ11820)

The First Minister: Partnership with business is an arrangement for liaison with business. It is not focused on specific sectors of industry but is aimed at securing the involvement of the business community as a whole in the National Assembly's decision-making processes. The Business Partnership Council facilitates this.

Partnership Agreement (Effectiveness)

Q19 Alun Cairns: Will the First Minister make a statement on the effectiveness of the partnership agreement in relation to the Government of Wales? (OAQ11750)

The First Minister: The partnership agreement has provided for a firm and certain delivery of policies for the people of Wales. A statement on the achievements so far with regard to 'Putting Wales First: A Partnership for the People of Wales' was made on 20 March 2001.

Recent Cabinet Functions Abroad

Q20 Janet Davies: Will the First Minister make a statement on functions that Cabinet colleagues have undertaken abroad recently? (OAQ11755) *Withdrawn.*

Assembly Policy on European Funding

Q21 Nick Bourne: Has the First Minister had any recent discussions with the European Union in relation to Assembly policy on European funding? (OAQ11822)

The First Minister: Discussions are now underway on the future of European funding post-2006 and, in Wales, we are considering what is best for us, and our views will be fed into the overall UK approach. The recent cohesion forum in Brussels provided a valuable insight into the key themes and concerns emerging across the existing 15 member states in relation to the future enlargement of the European Union. However, it is early days yet and it is important that we do not lose sight of achieving the best results from our existing EU programmes.

Questions to the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economic Development

Finance Wales (Performance)

Q6 Jocelyn Davies: Will the Minister give an update on the performance of Finance Wales plc? (OAQ11783)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Economic Development (Michael German): On 2 March 2001, a direction was issued to the Welsh Development Agency by the Assembly (a copy of which will shortly appear on the intranet). This formally directed the WDA to transfer its financial products to Finance Wales plc, a wholly owned but independently managed subsidiary of the WDA. Finance Wales now operates a suite of financial products and management support programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises and community enterprises in Wales.

It is too early to assess the overall performance of Finance Wales, but it has made a positive start. The key objective in the coming weeks and months is to secure European Commission approval for the ambitious Objective 1 projects, including a loan and mezzanine fund, an equity fund and two new funds to assist management succession issues and renewable energy, which Finance Wales is seeking to run.

Welsh Tourism Industry

Q7 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the Minister report on any discussions that he has had with the Secretary of State for Wales on future prospects for the Welsh tourism industry? (OAQ11789)

Michael German: When I met the Secretary of State on the 23 April, we discussed the impact of foot and mouth disease on the Welsh tourism industry and the measures being taken to assist tourism businesses facing difficulties as a result of foot and mouth disease, such as rate relief, changes to the

small firms loan guarantee scheme, the establishment of a rural task and finish group and additional funding for the Wales Tourist Board to market Wales.

Economic Development in Barry

Q8 David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on opportunities for economic development in Barry? (OAQ11742)

Michael German: This administration's aim is to ensure that the whole of Wales benefits from Assembly policies that provide support to areas of social and economic need.

As part of that, we are developing a national economic development strategy. This will concentrate on specific areas, such as encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation, developing the skills necessary for an advanced economy, encouraging businesses to be international in their outlook, and how we make Wales an attractive place for businesses and the people who work in those businesses.

In that way, we will encourage the development of an advanced, competitive economy in Wales. This will benefit the people of Wales, including those who work and live in Barry.

Finance Wales

Q9 Mick Bates: What discussions has the Minister had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding Finance Wales plc? (OAQ11794)

Michael German: I have had no discussions with the Secretary of State regarding Finance Wales plc.

Tourism Businesses in Rural Wales

Q10 Glyn Davies: What action has the Minister taken to help tourism businesses in rural Wales? (OAQ11816)

Michael German: I refer to the information leaflet sent to all Assembly Members setting out the assistance available for rural businesses in Wales. I will arrange for a further copy to be sent to you.

Economic Inactivity of Men Aged 60 to 64 in Former Coal Mining Areas

Q11 Pauline Jarman: Will the Minister make a statement on the economic inactivity of men aged 60 to 64 in former coal mining areas in Wales? (OAQ11786) [R]

Michael German: Inactivity levels in this group are high. Although we have no information on take-up for this group, support to help economically inactive men rejoin the labour market is available through the Assembly's work-based learning for adults programme and the UK Government's welfare to work programmes (principally the New Deal for disabled people and the New Deal 50 plus). In Wales, they are delivered in partnership with the National Assembly. These programmes will complement and contribute to National Assembly initiatives and strategies, such as Communities First and the national economic development strategy.

Foot and Mouth Disease (Financial Assistance to Welsh Businesses)

Q12 David Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the financial assistance given to Welsh businesses to help them cope with the effects of the foot and mouth disease eradication programme? (OAQ11770)

Michael German: I refer to the information leaflet sent to all Assembly Members setting out the assistance available for rural businesses in Wales. I will arrange for a further copy to be sent to you.

Foot and Mouth Disease (Discussions with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry)

Q13 Cynog Dafis: Will the Minister report on any discussions that he has had with the Secretary for State for Trade and Industry on the medium to long-term impact of foot and mouth disease on small businesses in Wales? (OAQ11777)

Michael German: As a member of the UK rural taskforce that was established to address the problems associated with the foot and mouth disease outbreak, and on which Department of Trade and Industry Ministers are represented, I have made clear the extent to which the disease has caused difficulties for our rural communities and businesses further afield. A package of measures has been drawn up to assist and we are continuing to monitor the situation closely.

Priority 5, Measure 5 of the Objective 1 Programme

Q14 Peter Rogers: What progress has been made on implementing priority 5, measure 5 of the Objective 1 programme? (OAQ11749) [R]

Michael German: A sum of £2,332,750 has been allocated from this measure so far, from an expected £3,931,000 allocation for 2000 and 2001. The £2,322,750 has been approved for the agri-food partnership project, administered by the National Assembly for Wales's Agriculture Department.

Foot and Mouth Disease (Effect on Tourism)

Q15 Eleanor Burnham: What measures has the Minister implemented to combat the effect on tourism following the foot and mouth disease crisis? (OAQ11762)

Michael German: I refer to the information leaflet sent to all Assembly Members setting out the assistance available for rural businesses in Wales. I will arrange for a further copy to be sent to you.

European Forum on the Cohesion Report

Q16 Elin Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the European forum on the cohesion report that he attended in Brussels recently? (OAQ11780) *Withdrawn.*

Sustainable Development Scheme

Q17 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: How will the Minister ensure that economic policy is being developed within the overarching framework of the sustainable development scheme? (OAQ11785) *Withdrawn.*

Establishing a National Institute of Technology for Wales

Q18 Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister make a statement on establishing a national institute of technology for Wales? (OAQ11763)

Michael German: I am anxious to progress plans to establish a national institute of technology for Wales. In furtherance of that aim, I met recently with interested parties to discuss the future of a Cymru.com Solutions report commissioned by the Welsh Development Agency, which makes various recommendations for taking such a development forward.

That proved to be a fruitful meeting. The upshot is that I have asked officials to prepare a fully costed development plan in conjunction with interested parties, which I hope to be able to present to the Assembly in the next few months.

Foot and Mouth Disease (Assisting Tourist Operators in Snowdonia)

Q19 Nick Bourne: What special measures are being put in place to assist tourist operators in Snowdonia as a consequence of the loss of revenue due to the foot and mouth disease outbreak? (OAQ11740)

Michael German: Gwynedd Council received the largest single allocation—some £1.5 million—from the Assembly's £12 million package to support businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. The Wales Tourist Board has provided £280,000 to support marketing initiatives for the 12 marketing areas in Wales, of which Snowdonia has been allocated £34,000.

Tourist Industry in Monmouthshire

Q20 David Davies: What measures is the Minister taking to help the tourist industry in Monmouthshire? (OAQ11771)

Michael German: Monmouthshire has an economic development strategy that includes tourism development and promotion. Monmouthshire is eligible for financial assistance from the Wales Tourist Board to support capital investment plans and there are also marketing opportunities and initiatives available through joint promotional work between the Wales Tourist Board, regional tourism companies, local authorities and the industry.

The Wales Tourist Board has just provided £11,500 for marketing initiatives specifically in Monmouthshire.

Finance Wales (Operation)

Q21 Gareth Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the operation of Finance Wales plc? (OAQ11784) *Withdrawn.*

Tourism in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire

Q22 Christine Gwyther: Will the Minister make a statement on any specific measures in place to help tourism in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire? (OAQ11815) *Withdrawn.*

Skills Audit for South Wales

Q23 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on the progress of a skills audit for south Wales and the training initiatives proposed to meet the identified expertise required by industries in this area? (OAQ11765)

Michael German: To help assess skills issues in Wales, the Assembly, with a wide range of partners including the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress, Education and Learning Wales, the Welsh Development Agency and the Welsh Local Government Association, has led the Future Skills Wales programme. The main report and regional reports, including reports for south-east and south-west Wales, were published in March 1999. Further work has since been done to identify the vocational skill needs of specific sectors and those reports were published in November 2000. Current work includes developing job outlook sheets to translate labour market information into a language and format that can be easily accessed by individuals.

ELWa is required, under the terms of its remit letter from the Assembly, to assess skill needs in Wales, working with employers, and put in place provision to help meet them. The skill needs for south Wales will be assessed by the regional councils for south-east and south-west Wales. Alongside this, community consortia for education and training are mapping provision to ensure that it meets the skill needs identified. In addition, sector skills assessments are carried out by employer-led national training

organisations, which are responsible for formulating strategies to tackle any skill shortages or gaps identified.

The Assembly, working through ELWa, has a range of programmes that help improve workforce skills in Wales, including work-based learning for adults, Skill Build, and Skill Seekers programmes. These programmes are aimed primarily at the unemployed and those aged under 25. We have recently introduced a modern skills diploma for adults and have abolished the upper age limit of 25 for modern apprenticeships.

Support Package for the Steel Communities in Wales

Q24 Phil Williams: Will the Minister give an update on the implementation of the support package for the steel communities in Wales? (OAQ11775) *Withdrawn.*

Development of Water Ways and Canals

Q25 Brian Hancock: Will the Minister make a statement on the development of water ways and canals in relation to tourism and economic development? (OAQ11779) *Withdrawn.*

Objective 1

Q26 Phil Williams: Will the Minister give an update on the uptake of funds within the Objective 1 programme? (OAQ11774) *Withdrawn.*

Local Business Rate Tax

Q27 Alun Cairns: Would the Minister make a statement on any representation that he has received over proposals to introduce a local business rate tax? (OAQ11769) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities.*

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): Several of the responses to our consultation on local government finance commented on the proposals for a supplementary local rate. As I indicated in my reply to you on 24 May (OAQ11654), I will consider all the comments received before making a final decision.

European Commission (Collective Redundancies)

Q28 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the Minister report on any discussions that he has had with the European Commission regarding its recent announcement on collective redundancies? (OAQ11776) *Withdrawn.*

New and Struggling Businesses in North Wales

Q29 Alison Halford: What actions has the Minister taken to advise and support new and struggling businesses in north Wales? (OAQ11829) *Withdrawn.*

Foot and Mouth Disease (Impact on the Welsh Tourism Industry)

Q30 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? (OAQ11787) *Withdrawn.*

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

Utilising the Additional £100 Million Allocated to the National Assembly Budget

Q9 Janet Ryder: Will the Minister make a statement on how the additional £100 million allocated to the National Assembly budget is being utilised? (OAQ11804)

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): I will make a statement to the Assembly as soon as possible about the allocation of the additional budget resources in the current financial year. This amounts to approximately £32.5 million. The balance of additional resources, approximately £67.3 million, will be allocated in the light of priorities established in the budget planning round.

Involvement of the Voluntary Sector in the Budgetary Process

Q10 David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on the involvement of the voluntary sector in the budgetary planning process? (OAQ11748)

Edwina Hart: Mechanisms are in place for the voluntary sector to have much greater involvement in the Assembly's budget planning than ever before. Recommendations from the voluntary sector partnership council have already informed the timing of the budget planning round and the voluntary sector scheme obliges Ministers to meet the voluntary sector at least once a year to discuss budget issues.

Foot and Mouth Disease (Additional Funding from the UK Treasury)

Q11 David Davies: Has the Minister been able to secure additional funding from the UK Treasury to enable the Assembly to meet its obligations to the sections of Wales affected most by foot and mouth disease? (OAQ11759)

Edwina Hart: In circumstances where additional funding is made available to English Departments to help meet the costs of the foot and mouth disease outbreak, the Assembly will receive consequential increases to its budget. Any such increase will be implemented at the time of the winter supplementary estimate later in the financial year.

Application of Best Value Policies

Q12 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the application of Best Value policies? (OAQ11812) *Transferred for written answer under the Minister's local government portfolio.*

Edwina Hart: A streamlined set of Best Value performance indicators approved by the Assembly came into effect on 1 April and a stocktake is underway to establish how lessons learned from the first year can be used to improve the effectiveness of Best Value policies.

Tendering Processes

Q13 Cynog Dafis: Would the Minister make a statement on the impartiality of tendering processes for contracts awarded by the National Assembly for Wales? (OAQ11802)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly's procurement activities are undertaken in a manner that is ethical, accountable and compliant with procedural, legal and international obligations.

Assembly contracts are submitted to open competition, not only as a way of providing a level playing field for all potential suppliers but to encourage suppliers to become more competitive. Those suppliers who are not awarded a contract are offered a debriefing interview to find out why not, and where they need to focus their efforts in order to win future contracts.

The Impact of Fiscal Policies on the Future Level of the Assembly Budget

Q14 David Davies: What discussions has the Minister had with the UK Treasury regarding the impact the UK Government's fiscal policies will have on the future level of the Assembly budget? (OAQ11758)

Edwina Hart: I have not had any discussions with the Treasury about the UK Government's fiscal policies. I have regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Wales and we discuss financial issues affecting Wales and the Assembly's budget. It is for the Secretary of State for Wales to bring these matters to the attention of UK Government Ministers.

Implications of the Treasury's 'Statistical Analyses 2001-02'

Q15 Phil Williams: 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'? (OAQ11811)

Edwina Hart: I have had no specific discussions about this publication on identifiable public expenditure but Assembly Ministers and officials are in touch with the UK Government on a regular basis about matters that concern Wales.

Spending on Consultants' Services

Q16 Brian Hancock: How much has been allocated for Assembly spending on consultants' services during the current financial year? (OAQ11809)

Edwina Hart: Specific provision for consultants' services to be paid from programme budgets has not been allocated for 2001-02. Proposals to engage consultants are cleared by the relevant Minister and me on a case-by-case basis. The proposals must establish the value for money and identify the appropriate budget that will meet the expenditure. To date, no proposals to incur expenditure against programme budgets have been approved.

Provision of £245,000 has been made to cover the costs of any consultants engaged to assist with the Assembly's administration. To date, no expenditure has been approved against this budget.

Slippage in the Assembly's Budget for 2000-01

Q17 David Melding: What amount of slippage occurred in the Assembly's budget for the year 2000-01? (OAQ11757)

Edwina Hart: Once actual expenditure is known, I propose to write to all Assembly Members about expenditure during the 2000-01 financial year and provide details of the main areas where the underspends occurred.

Spending the Additional £100 Million Allocated to the National Assembly

Q18 Gareth Jones: Will the Minister report on how key public services have been prioritised in deciding how the additional £100 million allocated to the National Assembly following the budget is to be spent? (OAQ11806)

Edwina Hart: The additional £100 million is allocated over three years and is included in the Assembly's reserve as set out in the supplementary budget adopted by the Assembly on 29 March 2001. For the current financial year, I propose to allocate the resources in the light of emerging pressures. I will consider the allocation for future years in the context of the budget planning round.

Reviewing the Tendering Process

Q19 Gareth Jones: Does the Minister have any intentions to review the tendering process for contracts awarded by the National Assembly? (OAQ11805)

Edwina Hart: The National Assembly follows EU public procurement procedures, which are applied consistently throughout UK Government departments.

The aim of the tendering process is to ensure that all procurement activities are ethical, accountable, and compliant with procedural, legal and international obligations, while achieving value for money.

While no change in the tendering process is currently proposed, the Assembly procurement unit maintains an ongoing review of best practice in the procurement community, to identify and evaluate new procedures.

Additional Funding for Areas Undergoing Major Structural Change

Q20 Jocelyn Davies: 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? (OAQ11810)

Edwina Hart: As the question recognises, it is a requirement of the Statement of Funding Policy that claims on the reserve for additional funding are made by the Secretary of State on behalf of the Assembly. On the occasions when I meet the Secretary of State for Wales we discuss a range of financial issues, especially those affecting areas of Wales that are subject to economic and social change. These meetings enable the Secretary of State to discuss funding issues affecting Wales with Treasury Ministers from an informed position.

Regeneration of Areas Heavily Dependent on the Steel Industry

Q21 Phil Williams: What discussions has the Minister had with the UK Treasury through the Secretary of State regarding special funding for regeneration of areas that are heavily dependent on the steel industry? (OAQ11807)

Edwina Hart: As the First Minister made clear in his statement to the Assembly on 3 May, the UK Government provided £16 million of the total £66 million remedial package for Corus. The Secretary of State for Wales made the case for additional regeneration funding in line with the requirements of the statement of funding policy; but this component of the package will be funded from the Assembly's budget. No additional funding was provided for this purpose in England.

Using Welsh Products in the Construction of the New Assembly Building

Q22 Delyth Evans: What is the Minister doing to ensure that Welsh products are being used in the construction of the new Assembly building? (OAQ11817)

Edwina Hart: The original motion to proceed with the Richard Rogers design for the Assembly building required the Assembly to pursue our goal of ensuring the use of Welsh materials. Great care has been taken to put together a procurement strategy that allows maximum scope for the use of Welsh materials within the constraints of the various procurement rules and value for money. The architects and the

management contractor have had discussions with some potential suppliers of Welsh materials to ensure that they understand our requirements.

Financing Capital Projects in the Public Sector

Q23 Peter Black: What discussions has the Minister had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding changing the public sector borrowing requirement rules in financing capital projects in the public sector? (OAQ11746) [R]

Edwina Hart: None. However, my officials are in regular contact with the Treasury and other Government departments as regards the rules governing the financing of capital projects.

Improving the Assembly's Overall Budgetary Process

Q24 Jonathan Morgan: What proposals does the administration have to improve the Assembly's overall budgetary process? (OAQ11760)

Edwina Hart: I have already announced the commencement of this year's budget planning round, which provides for the budget process to be completed within a shorter time scale than in previous years.

Alleviating Pensioner Poverty in Wales

Q25 Christine Gwyther: Can the Minister make a statement on what effect budget measures will have on alleviating pensioner poverty in Wales? (OAQ11826) *Withdrawn.*

Increased Public Spending in Wales

Q26 Delyth Evans: Will the Minister make a statement on the effects of increased public spending in Wales? (OAQ11818)

Edwina Hart: The effects of increased public spending in Wales depend upon the form taken by the increase. For spending associated with non-devolved matters, the effects will depend upon the policies adopted by the UK Government. For spending associated with devolved matters, increased spending in England will result in an addition to the Welsh block, which the Assembly can spend in accordance with its own priorities. The most recent budget, in March 2001, resulted in an additional allocation to the Welsh block of around £100 million over three years.

Using PFI in Funding Capital Projects in the Public Sector

Q27 Peter Black: What discussions has the Minister had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the use of the private finance initiative in funding capital projects in the public sector? (OAQ11747) [R]

Edwina Hart: I have had no discussion with the Chancellor on this issue.