

## Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 6 March 2001

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

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

### Questions to the First Minister

#### Infrastructure in North Wales

**Q12 Dafydd Wigley:** Will the First Minister make a statement on how the National Assembly for Wales's policies can help improve the infrastructure throughout north Wales? (OAQ10068)

**The First Minister:** The Assembly has already made a positive contribution in north Wales. For example, the Assembly is funding a direct passenger rail service between north and south Wales, the A55 is being extended as both a transport and information technology and communications link and the port of Mostyn is being improved through regional selective assistance. The Assembly is committed to improving the infrastructure of the whole of Wales. This is a key element in transforming the Welsh economy and is the drive behind our transport and information and communications technology policies.

#### The Criminal Justice and Police Bill

**Q13 Ann Jones:** What discussions has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for Wales, the Home Secretary and/or other United Kingdom Government Ministers about the impact in Wales of the Criminal Justice and Police Bill? (OAQ10061) *Withdrawn.*

#### Raising Wales's Profile in Europe

**Q14 Helen Mary Jones:** Will the First Minister make a statement on any discussion he has had with representatives of the European Union on raising the profile of Wales in Europe? (OAQ10066)

**The First Minister:** As First Minister and Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, I meet regularly with representatives from a variety of EU institutions to discuss European issues, including how the Assembly can raise its profile in Europe. On 28 February, I visited Brussels for a series of meetings relating to the Assembly's profile and policy agenda in the EU. Among other duties, I hosted a reception at the European Parliament to mark St David's Day. The St David's Day event at the Celtic Manor Hotel, also provided an opportunity for a wide-ranging debate on Wales, Europe and the wider world. Representatives from EU institutions and other EU member states attended along with 38 members of the London-based diplomatic corps and members of the Assembly's Committee on European Affairs. The event was considered to be a great success.

#### Representation of Wales Abroad

**Q15 David Lloyd:** Will the First Minister make a statement about his recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales on the representation of Wales abroad? (OAQ10064)

**The First Minister:** I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State on a wide-range of issues. I have discussed this issue in general terms but not at a specific meeting. Wales is represented abroad by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the exception of relations with the European Union, where the Assembly's administration has its own representation by way of two staff with diplomatic status who operate within the Wales European Centre and the United Kingdom permanent representation. In its inward investment function the Welsh Development Agency also has permanent staff based abroad to promote Wales.

### Policy Co-ordination of Cross-cutting Issues

**Q16 Cynog Dafis:** Will the First Minister make a brief statement on his role as policy co-ordinator for cross-cutting issues? (OAQ10070)

**The First Minister:** As I have said in answer to this question before, I and my Cabinet colleagues work closely together to ensure that our major themes are fully reflected in our work.

### 'Putting Wales First'

**Q17 Nick Bourne:** Will the First Minister make a statement on what 'Putting Wales First' has achieved? (OAQ10059)

**The First Minister:** In the six months since the agreement, we have developed radical proposals for the future direction of the health service; we have appointed the Children's Commissioner for Wales and have won legislation to provide him with more powers; we are targeting action on our most disadvantaged communities through Communities First; and we have begun the process of devising the new national economic development strategy.

We are also on target to bring forward our promised legislation, including that on local government and care, before the summer. Regulations in relation to the provision of free school milk for all key stage 1 pupils, and of frozen prescription pricing and extending free prescription categories have either been adopted by the Assembly or will be coming forward shortly.

### Implications of the Euro for Wales

**Q18 Christine Gwyther:** What discussions has the First Minister had with his ministerial colleagues at Westminster about the potential implications for Wales of the euro when it becomes fully operational in 2002? (OAQ10077) *Withdrawn.*

### Statements from Central Government

**Q19 Mick Bates:** What steps is the First Minister taking to ensure that statements from central Government affecting the National Assembly for Wales recognise the devolution settlement? (OAQ10075)

**The First Minister:** The memorandum of understanding and concordats require UK departments to consult us, and vice versa, in advance on all relevant announcements. I and my colleagues attach great importance to this, and will continue to intervene personally on the rare occasions where this principle has not been observed.

### Raising the Minimum Wage

**Q20 Janet Davies:** Will the First Minister make a statement on recent discussions between the Assembly and the Business Partnership Council regarding a rise in minimum wage? (OAQ10072)

**The First Minister:** The Business Partnership Council has not held any discussions regarding the level of minimum wage. The upgrading of the minimum wage from £3.70 to £4.10 per hour from 1 October 2001 was announced in the House of Commons by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 5 March 2001.

### **Priorities for Policy Development**

**Q21 Phil Williams:** Will the First Minister make a statement on the priorities of the National Assembly for Wales for policy development over the next 12 months? (OAQ10067)

**The First Minister:** I refer you to my statement in Plenary on 21 November and the debate on 14 December about the annual business programme. This reflects the legislative and Plenary programme for the National Assembly up to July 2001 in relation to implementing 'Putting Wales First' and 'Betterwales.com'. A further programme will be produced in the autumn.

### **Promoting Transparency in the Government of Wales**

**Q22 Elin Jones:** Will the First Minister make a brief statement on how he is seeking to promote transparency within the Government of Wales? (OAQ10071)

**The First Minister:** I want openness to be at the heart of Assembly business. Our meetings take place in public and are broadcasted. In addition, a register of Assembly documents is available on the internet. This site is still under development and will be expanded to include a wider range of information. Cabinet meeting minutes and press briefings are also available on the internet, as is the Assembly's Record of Proceedings.

### **Business Partnership Council (Stronger Relations with the Assembly)**

**Q23 Pauline Jarman:** What discussions has the First Minister had with the Business Partnership Council regarding stronger relations with the National Assembly for Wales? (OAQ10057)

**The First Minister:** We are considering a proposal to establish a business support unit to strengthen links between our partners and the Assembly. The proposal has been discussed with the Business Partnership Council.

### **Representing Wales in the European Union**

**Q24 Ieuan Wyn Jones:** As Minister in charge of the European dimension of Assembly policy, what is the First Minister doing to ensure that Wales is represented fully and adequately within the European Union? (OAQ10056)

**The First Minister:** The Assembly is well-represented within the EU institutions. There are currently five Welsh Members of the European Parliament. Wales also enjoys representation on the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee.

It is important for Wales to participate fully in the development of EU policy and we continually look for ways to achieve this. This includes the attendance of Assembly Ministers at EU Councils. Over recent months Assembly Ministers have attended the Agriculture, Education, Youth and Health Councils and on one occasion, on 9 November 2000, I led the UK Council of Ministers delegation. As well as representation within the various institutions, we continue to explore new opportunities and exploit existing ones in order to promote the interests of Wales.

The Minister for Assembly Business will chair the TeleRegions Network for the first time on Friday 9 March having recently been elected its president. The network's objective is to spread best practice in the use of information technology in linking regional administrations with the EU institutions and in improving competitiveness.

**Policy Statements by the UK Government**

**Q25 Peter Black:** Will the First Minister make a statement on how he is ensuring that the Assembly is consulted by the United Kingdom Government prior to policy statements which impact on the National Assembly for Wales? (OAQ10060)

**The First Minister:** I refer you to the answer I gave to Mick Bates's OAQ10075 today.