

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 13 February 2001

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

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

Questions to the First Minister

Cross-cutting Issues

Q9 Dafydd Wigley: Will the First Minister make a brief statement on progress of policy regarding cross-cutting issues? (OAQ9550) *Transferred for written answer.*

The First Minister: The sustainable development action plan is now due for Plenary debate on Tuesday 27 February.

We will be holding the postponed debate on diversity in public appointments on Thursday 15 February.

The second consultation exercise on the Communities First programme continues until 16 March 2001. A new community regeneration and social inclusion unit is now established to implement the Communities First programme and progress actions to combat social disadvantage.

Discussing Policies with the Business Partnership Council

Q10 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will the First Minister make a statement on policies that he will discuss with the Business Partnership Council concerning Wales? (OAQ9555) *Transferred for written answer.*

The First Minister: Topics to be discussed at the next Business Partnership Council meeting on 15 February are transport policy, 'Planning Policy Wales', review of business support and development services and the national economic development strategy. Copies of these papers and a full agenda can be found on the Assembly website.

Question 11 was answered in Plenary.

Discussions on E-commerce

Q12 Geraint Davies: Will the First Minister make a statement on the discussions in the Business Partnership Council on e-commerce? (OAQ9569)

The First Minister: The role of the Business Partnership Council is to exchange views on important and strategic business matters of common interest rather than specific programmes. E-commerce strategy was discussed at the partnership meeting on 30 June 2000, when proposals to promote its use were put forward by the Federation of Small Businesses.

Information and communication technology has also been discussed in detail by the Economic Development Committee in the course of its review of business support.

Discussions with the British-Irish Council

Q13 David Lloyd: Will the First Minister make a statement on discussions between the National Assembly for Wales and the British-Irish Council? (OAQ9558)

The First Minister: It is a matter of regret that the rescheduled 5 February meeting of the British-Irish Council did not take place, but the reasons that related to the Northern Ireland peace process were sufficiently compelling for a joint decision to refer the meeting to be taken by the British and Irish Governments. The British-Irish Council was always envisaged to be a part of the Northern Ireland peace process.

Developing Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Q14 Brian Hancock: Will the First Minister make a statement on discussions with the Business Partnership Council regarding the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in Wales? (OAQ9553)

The First Minister: The business support review and national economic development strategy are items to be discussed at the next Business Partnership Council on 15 February. Details of previous discussions held by the council can be found on the Assembly website.

Role of Special Advisers

Q15 Glyn Davies: What is the role of the Liberal Democrat/Labour coalition's special advisers? (OAQ9568)

The First Minister: Special advisers fulfill a range of duties to Ministers. These include reviewing policy papers as they go to Cabinet members, including drawing attention to political implications and ensuring that the more political points are dealt with appropriately.

They are also responsible for preparing policy papers and also help to prepare speeches, adding the party political context.

Special advisers also liaise with party officials and help to brief party Assembly Members where appropriate.

Policy Development

Q16 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the First Minister make a brief statement on the progress of overall policy development in Wales? (OAQ9556)

The First Minister: The Assembly Government is delivering a distinct policy agenda. Our work on health, care, economic development and social policy is increasingly widely recognised as ground-breaking, within and outside Wales, and is based on our commitment to develop policy openly and in partnership.

Policy Development of Non-devolved Issues

Q17 Helen Mary Jones: Will the First Minister make a brief statement on his recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales concerning policy development of non-devolved issues that relate to Wales? (OAQ9552)

The First Minister: I meet regularly with the Secretary of State for Wales to discuss issues relating to devolved matters and non-devolved UK Government expenditure and policies as they affect Wales.

Promoting Wales Internationally

Q18 William Graham: Will the First Minister make a statement on recent measures that he has taken to promote Wales internationally? (OAQ9577)

The First Minister: As I have made clear in response to a number of similar questions recently, raising the profile of Wales is a key priority for the Cabinet. The Assembly is working with other public sector bodies to develop a co-ordinated approach at an all-Wales level to enhance our international profile. We are developing a package of promotional material, including a CD-ROM and website, and identifying overseas events at which to promote Wales. The Assembly office in Brussels, an increasing number of visits to Wales by high-profile overseas politicians and officials, our trade missions programme, and the opportunities provided by our increased participation in international affairs will further increase Wales's profile on the international stage.

I am meeting the Ambassador of the United States of America on 14 February in Cardiff and An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern during his visit to the Assembly on 1 March. These visits will help to promote Wales and the National Assembly in the USA and in Ireland.

Implications of the Euro for Wales

Q19 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? (OAQ9575) *Withdrawn.*

Rural Affairs Policies

Q20 Pauline Jarman: Will the First Minister make a brief statement on how his role as policy development co-ordinator affects rural affairs policies? (OAQ9557)

The First Minister: I take a close interest in all the work of the Assembly, including rural affairs. The work that we have done focused around the rural development plan and other European Union structural funds and the future of farming mean that we are well ahead in developing our rural strategy.

The Minister for Rural Affairs has convened a meeting of the rural partnership, taking place tomorrow, and will be putting proposals to the partnership about how to further develop policy for rural Wales.

Criminal Records Bureau

Q21 Mick Bates: What discussions has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department regarding the operation of the Criminal Records Bureau in Wales? (OAQ9571)

The First Minister: None. However, the Minister for Health and Social Services wrote to the Home Secretary on 11 January expressing concerns about the problems that the proposed charges for criminal record checks by the Criminal Records Bureau could cause for the voluntary sector in Wales.

'Variable Geometry UK'

Q22 Janet Davies: Will the First Minister make a brief statement further to his speech, 'Variable Geometry UK', made to the Institute of Welsh Affairs on 2 February 2000? (OAQ9549)

The First Minister: I was not First Secretary on 2 February 2000, and made no such speech on that date.

Provision for Wales in Bills before Parliament

Q23 Peter Black: What discussions has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding provision for Wales in current Bills before Parliament? (OAQ9547)

The First Minister: I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding provision for Wales in the five current Bills before Parliament.

Effect of EU Policies on the Prosperity of People in Wales

Q24 David Davies: Has any assessment been made into the effects of European Union policies on the prosperity of the people of Wales? (OAQ9548)

The First Minister: European Union policies affect people's lives in Wales in many ways and their effects are best considered in the context of individual policy areas rather than across the board.

Hosting Major National and International Events

Q25 Ann Jones: Will the First Minister make a statement about the opportunities for Wales to host major national and international events over the next three years? (OAQ9566)

The First Minister: I am delighted with our recent success in securing several high profile events to Wales and will continue to encourage and support bids for such events. Hosting such events will help significantly to promote Wales on the international stage and the Assembly is working with other public sector bodies to maximise the opportunities.

Raising Wales's Profile within the UK

Q26 Nick Bourne: What is the First Minister doing to raise the profile of Wales within the United Kingdom? (OAQ9560)

The First Minister: The Assembly Government, working with Assembly sponsored public bodies such as the Wales Tourist Board and the Welsh Development Agency, is doing a great deal to promote Wales within the United Kingdom as an excellent place to do business, to live, and to visit.

The transfer of key high profile football fixtures from Wembley to the Millennium Stadium for the next three to four years is only the latest such example to showcase the benefit of Wales as a tourism and investment location.

Setting Targets in Assembly Departments

Q27 Alun Cairns: Will the First Minister make a statement on how the Assembly sets its targets in different departments? (OAQ9570)

The First Minister: 'Betterwales.com' sets out the strategic targets for the work as a whole. Annual goals for each area of work are then set in the operational plan. 'Betterwales.com' is being updated to reflect the commitments in the partnership agreement and proposed new targets will be subject to consultation.

Renewable Energy Schemes

Q28 Cynog Dafis: How will the First Minister balance the competing demands of renewable energy schemes with economic development and social needs? (OAQ9565)

The First Minister: 'Putting Wales First: A Partnership Agreement for the People of Wales' outlines how we will work effectively together to deliver policies for Wales. One of the core principles of the agreement is that we remain committed to ensuring that economic growth is environmentally and socially sustainable and this will be a key issue in our policy to develop the renewables sector in Wales.

The conclusions of our study into the potential for renewable energy in Wales will be used, together with the principles of 'Putting Wales First', to inform the development of a wider strategic energy framework for Wales.

We are also undertaking a detailed review of Technical Advice Note (Wales) 8: Renewable Energy, which will consider the planning implications associated with the development of all renewable energy sources in Wales. It is intended that the guidance should establish an effective way of facilitating the development of renewable energy while respecting the quality of the local environment. A technical advisory group has been established to progress the review of the TAN inclusively, and will consist of a range of those with an interest in planning policy for renewable energy.

Enlargement of the EU

Q29 Val Feld: Will the First Minister make a statement on the extent of the Assembly's policy on enlargement of the European Union? (OAQ9573) *Withdrawn.*

Achievements of the Liberal Democrat/Labour Coalition

Q30 Phil Williams: Will the First Minister make a brief statement on whether the Liberal Democrat/Labour coalition has ensured stability, vision and an Assembly that puts Wales first? (OAQ9567)

The First Minister: The partnership Government has succeeded in providing the National Assembly with a coherent policy programme, capable of delivering stable government and social justice to the people of Wales.

This programme, outlined in 'Putting Wales First', demonstrates the commitment of the partnership Government to deliver on its promises, by introducing a comprehensive three-year budgetary settlement, a detailed and distinctively Welsh legislative programme and targeted executive action to address the needs of the poorest and most deprived communities in Wales.