

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 18 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 Economic Development

Tyfiant Economaidd yng Nghymru

C7 Ieuan Wyn Jones: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar dyfiant economaidd yng Nghymru? (OAQ21302) [W]

Y Gweinidog dros Ddatblygu Economaidd (Andrew Davies): Nid yw ffigurau swyddogol Cymru ar gyfer eleni ar gael ar hyn o bryd, ond mae dangosyddion y farchnad lafur yn hynod o gryf. Mae diweithdra yng Nghymru yn parhau i fod ar lefel nas gwelwyd ers canol y 1970au, ac mae lefelau cyflogaeth yng Nghymru wedi codi o 33,000 yn ystod y flwyddyn hyd at fis Medi, er gwaethaf yr anawsterau mewn gweithgynhyrchu a gafodd lawer o sylw yn ddiweddar.

Economic Growth in Wales

Q7 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on economic growth in Wales? (OAQ21302) [W]

The Minister for Economic Development (Andrew Davies): There are as yet no official figures for Wales for the current year, but the labour market indicators are remarkably strong. Unemployment in Wales remains at levels not seen since the mid-1970s and employment in Wales has risen by 33,000 over the year to September, despite well-publicised difficulties in manufacturing.

GwellCymru.com

C8 David Lloyd: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar dargedau economaidd yn y ddogfen 'GwellCymru.com' i'w cyrraedd erbyn Mawrth 2003? (OAQ21317) [W]

Andrew Davies: Cawsom gynnydd sylweddol ar sawl targed yn GwellCymru.com. Erbyn mis Medi 2002, yr oedd nifer net y swyddi ychwanegol wedi cynyddu 35,000 o sylfaen 1998, ar sail targed o 40,000. Yn ogystal, mae nifer net y bobl dros 50 oed sydd mewn swyddi wedi cynyddu 40,000 ar y flwyddyn sylfaen, o'i gymharu â tharged o 20,000.

BetterWales.com

Q8 David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on the economic targets found in the 'BetterWales.com' document, to be achieved by March 2003? (OAQ21317) [W]

Andrew Davies: We have made significant progress against a number of the targets in BetterWales.com. By September 2002, the net additional jobs were up 35,000 on the 1998 base, against a target of 40,000. In addition, the net employment for people aged over 50 has increased by 40,000 on the base year, against a target of 20,000.

Wales International Centre in Tokyo

Q9 David Ian Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on the proposed Wales international centre in Tokyo? (OAQ21328)

Andrew Davies: This will be one of a number of centres built around the core business of international trade and inward investment. Japan's importance to the economy of Wales is well documented.

Zurich Financial Services Ltd, Prestatyn

Q10 Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the measures that the Assembly is taking to assist workers made redundant from Zurich Financial Services Ltd in Prestatyn? (OAQ21259)

Andrew Davies: I was disappointed to hear of these job losses. However, I am encouraged that Zurich has pledged to provide assistance to the employees to find alternative employment, and to offer redundancy compensation. Team Wales is already on the case and the Welsh Development Agency is pursuing opportunities with other companies for the staff. I understand that at least one company in the area is looking to recruit staff for similar work and this lead is being pursued.

Question 11 (OAQ21309) withdrawn.

Automotive Industry in Wales

Q12 Janice Gregory: What action has the Assembly Government taken to support the automotive industry in Wales? (OAQ21257)

Andrew Davies: The Welsh Assembly Government provides financial support to the Welsh Automotive Forum through the Welsh Development Agency. We also provide financial support to the Accelerate Wales programme, managed by the Welsh Development Agency. The Welsh Automotive Forum has been involved in the whole process and, since its start, the reaction of firms in the automotive sector has been enthusiastic.

Participation in the programme in the first 15 months enabled the firms involved to make annual savings conservatively estimated at just over £22 million a year. Underlying this figure are the seven measures of competitiveness. Improvements of between 8.59 per cent and 23.04 per cent were recorded for firms that had participated for nine or 15 months. These results are a clear indication that our partnership with industry is worthwhile.

Promoting Economic Development in the South Wales Valleys

Q13 Geraint Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on promoting economic development in the south Wales Valleys? (OAQ21310)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly Government's economic development strategy, 'A Winning Wales', outlines the policies to promote economic development throughout Wales, including the south Wales Valleys. Team Wales delivers a comprehensive package of advice and assistance to support investment and job creation. The south Wales Valleys qualify for maximum levels of assistance and are also benefiting from Objective 1 and Communities First assistance. Since the Assembly's inception, £40 million grant assistance has been provided to 121 companies in the south Wales Valleys. These projects will help to create almost 2,400 new jobs and safeguard 685.

Anweithgarwch Economaidd ymysg Pobl Ifanc

C14 David Lloyd: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar anweithgarwch economaidd ymysg pobl ifanc yng Nghymru? (OAQ21316) [W]

Andrew Davies: Mae'r tabl isod yn dangos cyfraddau anweithgarwch fesul grŵp oedran yng Nghymru yn 2001. Mae'r gyfradd anweithgarwch ar gyfer y grŵp 16 i 24 oed yn uwch nag ar gyfer y grŵp 25 i 49 oed. Y rheswm am hyn yw bod y diffiniad o bobl sy'n economaidd anweithgar yn cynnwys myfyrwyr. Mae hepgor myfyrwyr o'r boblogaeth sy'n anweithgar yn gostwng lefel yr anweithgarwch yn y grŵp iau i lefel sy'n gyffelyb i'r boblogaeth 25 i 49 oed.

Cyfraddau anweithgarwch yng Nghymru fesul grŵp oedran (canran y boblogaeth)					
	Grŵp oedran				
	16-24	25-34	35-49	50-59/64	16-59/64
Cyfanswm y gyfradd anweithgarwch	36	18	19	37	27
Cyfradd anweithgarwch ac eithrio myfyrwyr	15	17	18	37	23

Ffynhonnell: Arolwg gweithlu lleol Cymru 2001

Mae'r wybodaeth ddiweddaraf ar gyfer y boblogaeth oed gwaith yn gyffredinol yn dangos bod y cyfraddau anweithgarwch economaidd wedi gostwng yng Nghymru. Ar gyfer y tri mis hyd fis Medi 2002, 24.7 y cant oedd y gyfradd, sef 1.7 pwynt canran yn is na'r un cyfnod y llynedd.

Economic Inactivity among Young People

Q14 David Lloyd: Will the Minister make a statement on economic inactivity among young people in Wales? (OAQ21316) [W]

Andrew Davies: The table shows inactivity rates by age group in Wales in 2001. The economic inactivity rate for the 16 to 24-year-old group is higher than for the 25 to 49-year-old group. This is because the definition of economically inactive includes students. Taking students out of the inactive population reduces the rate of inactivity in the younger group to similar levels to the 25 to 49-year-old population.

Inactivity rates in Wales by age group 2001 (percentage of population)					
	Age group				
	16-24	25-34	35-49	50-59/64	16-59/64
Total inactivity rate	36	18	19	37	27
Inactivity rate excluding students	15	17	18	37	23

Source: Welsh local labour force survey 2001

The most recent information for the working age population as a whole indicates that economic inactivity rates in Wales have fallen. For the three months to September 2002, the rate was 24.7 per cent—1.7 percentage points lower than the same period a year earlier.

Tackling High Unemployment

Q15 Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the measures the Assembly is taking to tackle the problem of high unemployment in our most deprived communities? (OAQ21258)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly Government's economic development strategy, 'A Winning Wales', outlines the policies for transforming the economy and spreading prosperity throughout Wales. These are taken forward through Team Wales, which provides a comprehensive package of advice and assistance to help support investment and job creation. Most of the deprived communities are in areas benefiting from maximum levels of assistance from Team Wales, and from Objective 1 and Communities First assistance.

Since the Assembly's inception, we have provided grant assistance worth over £70 million to over 200 companies in north Wales. These projects will help to create over 5,000 new jobs and safeguard over 3,000.

Questions to the Finance Minister

Contingency Budget

Q8 Nick Bourne: How is the Assembly's contingency budget calculated each year? (OAQ21334)

The Finance Minister (Edwina Hart): I determine the level at which reserves are set during each budget planning round. The reserves are set to ensure that the needs of operating a prudent financial management system are met. They ensure that the Assembly can meet any unforeseen financial pressures that may arise in future years.

Underspend in the Budget Allocation for 2001-02

Q9 Phil Williams: Will the Minister make a statement on the underspend in the budget allocation for 2001-02? (OAQ21299)

Edwina Hart: On 20 June, I issued a Cabinet written statement to all Assembly Members about expenditure during the last financial year. Overall, Assembly expenditure was 99.1 per cent of total provision. However, the expenditure on the Assembly's departmental expenditure limit, over which the Assembly has full discretion, was 99.5 per cent of provision.

Budget Transparency in Public Services

Q10 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement on progress in achieving budget transparency in the provision of public services in Wales? (OAQ21303)

Edwina Hart: The current budget structure clearly identifies the funding that is passed on to local government, the health sector and Assembly sponsored public bodies. Adjustments to this structure will be made as and when required in order to maintain the required levels of transparency.

Private Finance Initiative Schemes

Q11 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on her criteria for recommending the approval of private finance initiative schemes? (OAQ21248)

Edwina Hart: Value for money is the key criterion. I set out the principles for the future use of PFI in my Plenary statement to the Assembly on investment through partnership in Wales on 13 December 2001.

Standard Spending Assessment 2002-03

Q12 Phil Williams: What progress has been made in reforming the provisional regression algorithms used to determine the standard spending assessment for 2002-03? (OAQ21298)

Edwina Hart: The techniques currently employed in producing the standard spending assessment formula were as recommended by the independent review undertaken by Swansea University and approved by the Assembly in 2000. The detailed elements of the formula are kept under constant review through the distribution sub-group of the Consultative Forum on Finance.

Local Government and Communities Portfolio

Q13 Janice Gregory: Will the Minister make a statement on the impact of her latest budget on the funding available for the local government and communities portfolio? (OAQ21292)

Edwina Hart: I refer you to the Record of Proceedings for a transcript of my statement to Plenary on the final budget on 6 November. The local government portfolio benefited from a 6.9 per cent increase in financial year 2003-04 over 2002-03, and the budget for the communities portfolio increased by 23 per cent in 2003-04 over 2002-03.

Portffolio Addysg

C14 Cynog Dafis: A oes gan y Gweinidog unrhyw gynlluniau dros y misoedd nesaf i roi cyllid ychwanegol i'r portffolio addysg? (OAQ21297) [W]

Edwina Hart: Ddoe, cafodd cynnig ei gymeradwyo gan y Cynulliad a oedd yn cynyddu darpariaeth y prif grŵp gwariant addysg a dysgu gydol oes ar gyfer 2002-03 o £39.257 miliwn. Byddaf hefyd yn trafod gwariant llawn 2002-03 ar y prif grŵp gwariant hwn pan fyddaf yn cyfarfod â'r Gweinidog dros Addysg a Dysgu Gydol Oes fis nesaf, fel rhan o'r broses o adolygu holl wariant y Cynulliad yn ystod y flwyddyn ariannol hon gyda fy nghyd-Aelodau yn y Cabinet.

Education Portfolio

Q14 Cynog Dafis: Does the Minister have any plans during the next few months to give extra funding to the education portfolio? (OAQ21297) [W]

Edwina Hart: Yesterday, the Assembly approved a motion that increased the 2002-03 provision of the education and lifelong learning main expenditure group by £39.257 million. I will also be discussing the full expenditure for 2002-03 on this main expenditure group when I meet the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning next month, as part of my review with Cabinet colleagues of all Assembly expenditure during this financial year.

Environment, Planning and Transport Portfolio

Q15 Janet Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the funding allocated to the environment, planning and transport portfolio in the budget? (OAQ21249)

Edwina Hart: I refer you to the Record of Proceedings for a transcript of my statement to Plenary on the final budget, on 6 November. The environment, transport and planning portfolio was allocated an additional £49.2 million for financial year 2003-04 over 2002-03.