

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 20 June 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 Sport, Culture and the Welsh Language

Gold Cape of Mold

Q9 Alison Halford: What discussions has the Minister had with the Wales Tourist Board and the British Museum regarding the gold cape of Mold? (OAQ18399)

The Minister for Sport, Culture and the Welsh Language (Jenny Randerson): As the First Minister explained in his written answer to you recently, any museum wishing to borrow the gold cape from the British Museum can have direct discussions on the issue with the British Museum itself.

Auditing Cultural Venues

Q10 Elin Jones: What work has been undertaken with regard to the audit of cultural venues in Wales, as indicated in the culture strategy 'Creative Future'? (OAQ18384)

Jenny Randerson: The Arts Council of Wales commissioned an audit of arts venues in summer 2001 that will be published on its website shortly. The Sports Council for Wales has a database of sports facilities and will be working with the arts council and the Welsh Local Government Association to meet the aspiration in 'Creative Future: Cymru Greadigol' to carry out an audit of cultural venues.

Accessibility of Works of Art

Q11 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement on the accessibility to the public of works of art in Wales? (OAQ18436)

Jenny Randerson: The Welsh Assembly Government has already increased public access to works of art in Wales by introducing free admission to the national museum. Public access forms a key part of my culture strategy 'Creative Future: Cymru Greadigol'. Both the arts council and the national museum are looking at ways of increasing access to and appreciation of art in Wales.

Benefits of Sport to Young People

Q12 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on the benefits of participation in sport by young people in Wales? (OAQ18398)

Jenny Randerson: Participation in sport by young people in Wales has enormous benefits. It can improve health, education and social cohesion as well as creating enjoyment and provides a first-class base to develop life skills such as teamwork, leadership, interpersonal communication and good citizenship.

Promoting Minority Languages

Q13 Janet Davies: What recent discussions has the Minister had with the European Commissioner for Education and Culture about promoting minority languages? (OAQ18410)

Jenny Randerson: I accompanied the European Commissioner for Education and Culture, Mme Viviane Reding, during a number of her engagements when she visited the site of the Wales Millennium Centre, and the Urdd Eisteddfod, on 3 June. It was not the occasion for formal discussions, but the commissioner made it clear in informal conversation, and in her formal speech at the Welsh Language Board reception at the Urdd Eisteddfod, that she is extremely supportive of minority languages. The European Commission is working on a strategy to promote language learning and linguistic diversity, by integrating support for minority languages into mainstream programmes. The Welsh Language Board will be among the organisations which the commission will consult while it is drawing up its strategy.

Promoting Welsh-language Theatre

Q14 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on the promotion of Welsh-language theatre? (OAQ18404)

Jenny Randerson: The Arts Council of Wales requires all its revenue-funded venues to address the provision of Welsh language performances for its audiences. The venues are keen to develop Welsh language audience but have identified a lack of product. The establishment of a National Welsh Language Theatre company with a remit to produce shows that will attract mainstream audiences is a key way of addressing this. The council is therefore allocating £250,000 for this purpose for 2002-03. This money will allow two productions this year (£100,000 each), with £50,000 for initial start-up costs for a production company.

Funding for Minority Languages

Q15 Cynog Dafis: What discussions did the Minister have with the European Commissioner for Education and Culture about European Union funding for minority languages during their recent meeting? (OAQ18411)

Jenny Randerson: I accompanied the European Commissioner for Education and Culture, Mme Viviane Reding, during a number of her engagements when she visited the site of the Wales Millennium Centre, and the Urdd Eisteddfod, on 3 June. It was not the occasion for formal discussions, but the commissioner made it clear in informal conversation, and in her formal speech at the Welsh Language Board reception at the Urdd Eisteddfod, that she is extremely supportive of minority languages. The commission is working on a strategy to promote language learning and linguistic diversity, by integrating support for minority languages into mainstream programmes. The Welsh Language Board will be among the organisations which the commission will consult while it is drawing up its strategy.

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

The Tir Mynydd 2 Scheme

Q8 Jocelyn Davies: Will the Minister give a progress report on the Tir Mynydd 2 scheme? (OAQ18420)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Rural Development and Wales Abroad (Michael German): I hope to publish a consultation paper later this month. The paper will cover different options for the future shape of Tir Mynydd, including the continuation of the existing scheme with which farmers are now familiar.

Farmers' Income

Q9 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on farmers' incomes? (OAQ18406)

Michael German: This information was provided to you in a written reply on 15 April 2002 (WAQ17016).

The latest data on farm incomes is drawn from the farm business survey published on 1 February 2002. This forecast a modest growth for all dairy and livestock net farm incomes in 2001-02. Slight falls in net income are forecast for the cattle and sheep sector.

Retirement Scheme for Farmers

Q10 Helen Mary Jones: Will the Minister give a progress report on his intentions to develop a retirement scheme for farmers? (OAQ18416)

Michael German: I am not convinced that a scheme aimed purely at farmers wishing to retire would be cost effective or appropriate. I have asked officials to investigate the feasibility of a scheme whereby a retiring farmer might use a farm to set up an annuity to fund a pension, thus enabling a young person to purchase the farm over an agreed period. There are a number of obstacles to overcome and complex legal issues to address before such a scheme could be introduced.

The Proposed Countryside Grant Scheme

Q11 Janet Ryder: Will the Minister make a statement regarding the progress of the proposed countryside grant scheme? (OAQ18417)

Michael German: The possibility of a countryside grant scheme is being considered within the review of agri-environmental schemes being undertaken as part of the common agricultural policy reform mid-term review process and within the framework of the Objective 1 programme.

The Future of Heritage Fisheries in Wales

Q12 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement about the future of heritage fisheries in Wales? (OAQ18432)

Michael German: I am aware of your particular concern about the future of the Blackrock lave net salmon fishery.

In the Assembly Government's formal response to the review of salmon and freshwater fisheries, we acknowledged the importance of heritage fisheries and gave assurances that no restrictions would be placed on such fisheries without full and meaningful consultation with interested parties.

The Tir Mynydd 2 Scheme Working Group

Q13 Cynog Dafis: Will the Minister give a progress report on the working group set up to look at the Tir Mynydd 2 scheme? (OAQ18422)

Michael German: The Tir Mynydd 2 working group comprises officials from my department, the farming unions, the Countryside Council for Wales and environmental interests. Its membership was agreed in January, and it has met three times. Its discussions have helped my officials to draft a consultation document setting out different options for revising the Tir Mynydd scheme, which I hope to publish later this month.

The working group's terms of reference also cover the sheep annual premium national envelope. They played a useful role in contributing to the drafting of the consultation paper on the operation of the SAPS national envelope for 2003 and beyond, which I issued on 10 May.

The Assembly's Policy in Relation to Genetically Modified Crops in Wales

Q14 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on the Assembly's current policy in relation to genetically modified crops in Wales? (OAQ18434)

Michael German: The Assembly's policy, as set out in the partnership agreement, 'Putting Wales First', is to operate the most restrictive policy possible within the context of EU legislation on future commercial GM crop development in Wales. We will also seek to exploit the marketing opportunities of identifying Welsh agricultural produce as GM-free.

Increasing the Profile of Fisheries in Wales

Q15 Elin Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on action he has taken to increase the profile of fisheries in Wales? (OAQ18423)

Michael German: Work is well advanced on an all-Wales fisheries strategy, which we and the fishing industry agree is necessary to give Welsh fisheries a focus for future development.

Two groups, which include practitioners, led by the Welsh Development Agency and Environment Agency respectively, are considering all aspects of commercial sea fisheries, aquaculture and inland recreational fisheries. Reports from these two groups will form the basis of an overarching strategy document, which will be subject to full consultation later this year.