

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 25 October 2001

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

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

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Questions on Economic Development to the First Minister

Economic Implications of the Terrorist Attacks

Q8 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Has the First Minister had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding the economic implications following the terrorist attacks on the USA? (OAQ13049)

The First Minister: National Assembly officials are in regular contact with the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, the Welsh Development Agency, other agencies and the private sector to assess the economic implications for Wales, following the terrorist attacks on the USA. I am particularly concerned about our aerospace sector and have personally approached a number of these companies. I have heard at first hand the difficulties that they are encountering and have gained an appreciation of their plans. These companies are monitoring their positions closely and are committed to keeping me informed of developments.

The Proposed Manufacturing Summit

Q9 Janet Davies: What discussions has the First Minister had with the Department of Trade and Industry in relation to the proposed manufacturing summit? (OAQ13062)

The First Minister: I refer to my answer given to question 5 (OAQ13053) in Plenary today.

Promoting Wales as a Tourist Destination

Q10 Jonathan Morgan: Will the First Minister make a statement on how the events of 11 September have affected plans to promote Wales as a leading tourist destination? (OAQ13052)

The First Minister: We envisage that there will be significant short-term and longer-lasting effects on tourism in Wales. The British Tourist Authority estimates that visitors to Britain from the USA and Canada could be down by 60 and 40 per cent respectively, for the rest of this year. As the USA is Wales's largest single tourism market, the Wales Tourist Board is reviewing its planned marketing campaigns in the USA. It is likely that the board's planned activities in Europe will continue and that marketing in the UK will be increased, as there are already signs of visitors switching from overseas to UK holiday destinations this autumn.

Tackling Economic Problems in Rural Wales

Q11 Geraint Davies: Will the First Minister make a statement on the ways in which the forthcoming plan for Wales will tackle economic problems in rural parts of Wales? (OAQ13048)

The First Minister: 'Plan for Wales 2001' sets out our radical programme to create a modern Wales, including our agenda for the long-term direction of Welsh agriculture and our commitment to develop a strategy for rural Wales.

I made a detailed statement on the 'Plan for Wales 2001' in Plenary today.

Question 12 (OAQ13082) withdrawn.

Supporting the Aerospace Industry

Q13 Ann Jones: What support is the First Minister considering making available to the aerospace industry in Wales in light of the consequences of the events of 11 September? (OAQ13050)

The First Minister: I am concerned about our aerospace sector in Wales and have heard at first hand the difficulties and uncertainties that it is encountering. These companies are monitoring their positions closely and are committed to keeping me informed of developments. Assembly Government officials are continuing to monitor the situation closely, as is the Welsh Development Agency.

The Establishment of Brass Plate Companies

Q14 David Davies: What action can the First Minister take to protect against the establishment of brass plate companies in Wales? (OAQ13054)

The First Minister: Last week the Chancellor of the Exchequer made a statement which set out the UK action plan on terrorist financing, which I support wholeheartedly.

The National Economic Development Strategy (Targets)

Q15 Phil Williams: What progress has been made in setting regional targets for the national economic development strategy? (OAQ13060)

The First Minister: The Economic Development Committee will be presented with a draft of the strategy for its meeting on 31 October.

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

One-off Capital Payments

Q5 Alun Cairns: Have funds been made available to health for one-off capital payments? (OAQ13114)

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): Health and social services have been allocated £40 million end year flexibility for immediate capital spending in 2000-01. There is also funding from end year flexibility of £19.6 million for 2002-03 and £22 million for 2003-04 for capital projects.

Spending Increases for Health and Social Services

Q6 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the proposed spending increases for health and social services in her latest budget announcement? (OAQ13118)

Edwina Hart: My draft budget announcement of 18 October included overall spending increases for health and social services of £42.8 million for 2002-03 and £57.9 million in 2003-04, reflecting its

importance as an Assembly priority. I also allocated an additional £40.5 million from end year flexibility for immediate capital spending throughout Wales this year, the details of which will be announced by the Minister for Health and Social Services over the next few weeks. Further end year flexibility of £19.6 million will be available in 2002-03 and £22 million in 2003-04.

Costs of the New Assembly Building

Q7 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on the latest projected costs of the new Assembly building that is planned by the administration? (OAQ13112)

Edwina Hart: As stated in answer to question 4, we are currently seeking proposals through a notice in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. That notice seeks proposals for the Assembly to either make a capital purchase of the building or for the Assembly to lease the completed building. The costs for those two alternatives will be very different. It will be for those who submit proposals to propose the cost levels. I will present proposals to the Assembly once tenders have been received and reviewed.

Question 8 (OAQ13104) withdrawn.

Total Costs of the New Assembly Building

Q9 William Graham: Will the Minister outline the total costs to date for the new Assembly Chamber building, indicating those resulting from the termination of contracts and increased expenditure resulting from the delay in construction? (OAQ13103)

Edwina Hart: The provisional total spend to date is estimated as approximately £5.1 million. Until the procurement process has run its course, I am unable to provide details of any new cost estimates. These are dependent on the proposals eventually received in response to tenders. Correspondence is ongoing to reach a settlement on the Richard Rogers Partnership contract. I cannot disclose the details at this stage.

Assisting Projects in the South Wales West Region

Q10 Peter Black: How much additional money has been allocated in the budget to assist prestigious projects in the South Wales West region? (OAQ13108)

Edwina Hart: Many of the changes announced in my budget last week will benefit the whole of Wales. However, the South Wales West region will benefit specifically from additional resources earmarked for projects in the health and arts capital programmes as well as the development of sites by the Welsh Development Agency and the extension of the Corus package.

Ensuring Value for Money

Q11 Jonathan Morgan: Will the Minister make a statement on how she is ensuring value for money across the Assembly's budget? (OAQ13113)

Edwina Hart: I am undertaking a wide-ranging programme of action to improve value for money across all our spending. Steps include a major drive to get better value in how the public sector in Wales procures its goods and services; ensuring that the Assembly and all the major public bodies it funds have asset management plans; reviewing all our sponsored bodies; and a programme of evaluating the Assembly's policies, programmes and grant schemes. We have also introduced a performance management framework for the NHS in Wales and the Best Value regime for local authorities.

Funding for One-off Capital Projects

Q12 Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on the availability of funding within the budget for one-off capital projects? (OAQ13092)

Edwina Hart: As I explained in my draft budget statement on 18 October, I have made significant sums available for capital projects. That is primarily unspent resources carried forward from previous financial years. Individual Cabinet Ministers will announce details of the projects funded in this way.

Changes to the Budgetary System

Q13 John Griffiths: Are any changes to the budgetary system envisaged to further improve financial efficiency? (OAQ13091)

Edwina Hart: As in previous years I shall review the budget planning system following the final budget.

Public-Private Partnerships

Q14 David Melding: What representations has the Minister received on the future use of public-private partnerships in Wales? (OAQ13111)

Edwina Hart: I have had discussions with various bodies, including the Welsh Local Government Association and Unison, about the future use of public-private partnerships in Wales. I have also carried out a consultation on this issue. I will make a statement to the Assembly on the outcome of this consultation in the next few weeks.

Discussions regarding the Comprehensive Spending Review

Q15 Elin Jones: Will the Minister report on discussions with the relevant UK Government departments regarding the next comprehensive spending review? (OAQ13101)

Edwina Hart: The next spending review is at an early stage and I have regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Wales on such matters. My officials are actively involved in the process.

Questions to the Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language

Questions 8 (OAQ12726) and 9 (OAQ12750) withdrawn.

A National Art Gallery for Wales

Q10 Nick Bourne: What representations has the Minister received for a dedicated national art gallery of Wales? (OAQ12695)

The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language (Jenny Randerson): I have received a number of letters on this subject. There has also been much interest in the review of the display of art currently being carried out by the National Museums and Galleries of Wales. It has completed the first stage of the review, and has prepared a summary report. Representatives from that body outlined the findings of the report at a seminar last term, to which all Assembly Members were invited.

During the second stage of the review there will be further consultation. Final conclusions and options for the future will be published by the National Museums and Galleries of Wales in a public consultation document later this year.

Questions 11 (OAQ12702), 12 (OAQ12701) and 13 (OAQ12703) withdrawn.

A Progress Report on the Wales Millennium Centre

Q14 Jocelyn Davies: Will the Minister give a brief progress report on recent discussions she has had regarding the Wales Millennium Centre? (OAQ12791)

Jenny Randerson: During the summer, my ministerial colleagues and I had extensive discussions with Sir David Rowe-Beddoe. For his team to be able to negotiate a fixed price for the construction contract with Sir Robert McAlpine, it was necessary to clarify the willingness of the Assembly to commit funds to the project. We agreed that the Assembly would set aside up to £37 million for the project, and would be willing to make the full amount available, should it be required. This includes the £8 million previously committed. We also made clear that this represented the absolute maximum of Assembly support. The project is now in the final stages of its discussions over the price of the construction contract and I look forward to an outcome next month.

Question 15 (OAQ12704) withdrawn.

The Wales Millennium Centre

Q16 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the progress of the Wales Millennium Centre? (OAQ12740)

Jenny Randerson: I refer you to the answer I gave to Question 14 (OAQ12791).

Promoting Cardiff to be European Capital of Culture 2008

Q17 Nick Bourne: What progress has the Minister made in promoting Cardiff to be European Capital of Culture 2008? (OAQ12696)

Jenny Randerson: The National Assembly has agreed to support Cardiff City and County Council in developing a bid for European Capital of Culture status in 2008. We have agreed that up to £500,000 will be available to match fund the cost of preparing the bid. A company limited by guarantee is being established by Cardiff City and County Council to take forward development of the bid.

I want to ensure that the National Assembly does everything it can to support Cardiff's bid and that the benefits of a successful bid should be shared by the whole of Wales.

Welsh National Opera

Q18 Peter Black: What discussions has the Minister had with the Welsh National Opera concerning its programme of performances around Wales? (OAQ12729) [R]

Jenny Randerson: I met with representatives of the Welsh National Opera in May to discuss stabilisation of funding, which would allow it to maintain its activity throughout Wales. I met those representatives again on 8 October, together with a delegation from Swansea, about its programme of performances. The increased provision for the Arts Council of Wales in the draft budget will enable the council to place the Welsh National Opera on a secure financial footing and secure its future touring programme.

Promoting Community Arts and Arts at Grass-roots Level

Q19 Pauline Jarman: How will the Minister promote community arts and arts at grass-roots level? (OAQ12783)

Jenny Randerson: My culture strategy identifies the development of community arts groups as a major priority, because of their key role in encouraging participation in arts activities. I have asked the Arts Council of Wales to develop strategies to recognise the importance of community, grass-roots activity in developing the arts in Wales.

I want it to do this while also protecting the position of the national remit companies, which have a valuable role in developing excellence, and in promoting Wales's image in the UK and abroad. It must do so in co-operation with community arts companies, and not in competition with them.

Support to the Special Olympics

Q20 Brian Hancock: What support is the National Assembly giving to the Special Olympics this summer? (OAQ12785)

Jenny Randerson: The National Assembly stepped in to help this year's Special Olympics UK National Summer Games held in Cardiff by awarding a grant of £64,000 to ensure the eight-day event did not have to be scaled down because of cash problems.

The Assembly's grant was in addition to the £10,000 the Sports Council for Wales contributed towards the games. The council also made available the facilities at the Welsh Institute of Sport, Sophia Gardens, for some of the events and will now assist the Welsh athletes who competed at the games to pursue their sporting ambitions through an ongoing programme of development.

Question 21 (OAQ12687) withdrawn.

Maintaining Standards in Regional Programming

Q22 Cynog Dafis: How will the forthcoming legislation on broadcasting and communications ensure that standards in regional programming are maintained? (OAQ12787)

Jenny Randerson: I have not yet seen the draft legislation, but I have been advised by Kim Howells that it will be published for consultation in the spring. The White Paper suggested that the Government would be looking to retain and strengthen the regional dimension to public service broadcasting, and ensure that public service broadcasting continues to meet the needs of different communities and cultural interests. The Assembly's response to the White Paper recommended that the Office of Communications should be given a specific duty to set targets for production in the UK nations and England's regions.

The Welsh Rugby Union's Centre of Excellence

Q23 Alun Cairns: Will the Minister outline her recent discussions regarding the progress of the Welsh Rugby Union's rugby centre of excellence? (OAQ12775)

Jenny Randerson: I have not held any discussions recently about the Welsh Rugby Union's rugby centre of excellence. The Sports Council for Wales has written to the WRU asking it to put forward a strategy towards the development of rugby, underpinning both national and regional facility needs.

Supporting the Growth and Development of Grass-roots Football in Wales

Q24 Lynne Neagle: What plans does the Minister have for supporting the growth and development of grass-roots football in Wales? (OAQ12705)

Jenny Randerson: I have established a football forum in Wales in order to develop a strategy for the development of football for young people. The forum will also examine and define the roles and responsibilities of the various footballing bodies within the new strategy. This will help support the future growth and development of grass-roots football in Wales.

Grass-roots Arts Activity and National Cultural Institutions (Enhancing Links)

Q25 Janet Ryder: What action will the Minister take to enhance the links between grass-roots arts activity and our national cultural institutions? (OAQ12790)

Jenny Randerson: My culture strategy identifies the development of community arts groups as a major priority, because of their key role in encouraging participation in arts activities. I have asked the Arts Council of Wales to develop strategies to recognise the importance of community, grass-roots activity in developing the arts in Wales.

I want it to do this while also protecting the position of the national remit companies, which have a valuable role in developing excellence, and in promoting Wales's image in the UK and abroad. It must do so in co-operation with community arts companies, and not in competition with them.

Question 26 (OAQ12727) withdrawn.

Special Olympics

Q27 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the Special Olympics taking place in Cardiff this summer? (OAQ12786)

Jenny Randerson: I was delighted that the Special Olympics UK National Summer Games was held in Cardiff between 28 July and 4 August 2001. It was the first time in the history of the games that the event had been held in Wales. The event gave us an ideal opportunity to continue to play our part in promoting sport for those with learning difficulties across the UK.

The games brought together over 2,500 competitors, competing in 16 different events at facilities across Cardiff. The event also attracted many thousands of supporters, carers and volunteers. Many positive reports have been received from team members and their families about the event, which has been hailed a great success.

In addition to the Sports Council for Wales's package of support, the Assembly provided a grant of £64,000 towards the games. This support contributed to the overall success of the event and helped ensure that our visitors have special memories of Cardiff and Wales.

The Proposed Decentralisation of the Arts Council of Wales

Q28 David Davies: Will the Minister outline the benefits to rural areas of the proposed decentralisation of the Arts Council of Wales? (OAQ12693)

Jenny Randerson: The decentralisation proposed in the Arts Council of Wales's action plan for restructuring is the best way for the council to deliver its strategic priorities locally as well as nationally.

Decentralisation means that the Arts Council of Wales's expertise and presence in the regional offices is being strengthened and that regional officers will be able to develop strong contacts with the local arts communities.

I have helped this process through appointments to the council. I have recently appointed two new members from north Wales and one from Powys.

Funding the Welsh National Opera

Q29 Peter Black: What meetings has the Minister had with the Welsh National Opera regarding its funding? (OAQ12728) [R]

Jenny Randerson: I met with representatives of the Welsh National Opera in May, and again recently on 8 October to discuss funding issues. The increased provision for the Arts Council of Wales in the draft budget will enable the council to place the Welsh National Opera on a secure financial footing.

Raising the Profile of Wales

Q30 Dafydd Wigley: Will the Minister make a statement on the opportunities to raise the international profile of Wales through the United Nations Organisation for Education, Science, Culture and Communications programmes? (OAQ12794)

Jenny Randerson: The United Kingdom has only recently rejoined UNESCO so there is much work to be done in terms of raising the profile of this organisation and its aims within the UK. I have agreed that there will be an Assembly presence at the UNESCO general conference in Paris at the end of October after which UK UNESCO will be organising meetings with the devolved administrations to harness expertise and disseminate information about its work. I will ensure that Wales plays a full part in this exercise, and makes the best possible use of the significant opportunities UNESCO can undoubtedly provide. I also plan to meet with representatives of UK UNESCO to discuss how best to develop our working relationship and to promote the profile of Wales internationally.

Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs

The National Assembly's Woodland Strategy

Q2 Cynog Dafis: Will the Minister make a statement on the National Assembly's woodland strategy? (OAQ12769) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Carwyn Jones): I launched 'Woodlands for Wales', the National Assembly's strategy for trees and woodlands, earlier this month. The strategy sets out a new vision for Welsh woodlands. It is a vision that looks forward 50 years, when Wales will be known for its high-quality woodlands. It is a vision of woodlands that are in tune with the local environment; of woodlands that enhance the landscape. It is a vision of diverse woodlands, with a wide mixture of species and habitats.

The strategy was developed after wide consultation with the public and with groups representing a wide variety of interests.

Questions 3 (OAQ12781) was answered in Plenary. Questions 4 (OAQ12755) and 5 (OAQ12716) withdrawn.

Developing Fisheries off the Coast

Q6 Kirsty Williams: What steps can the Minister take to protect and develop salmon, sea trout and wild brown trout fisheries off the coast? (OAQ12690) *Transferred for written answer.*

Carwyn Jones: Within the overall responsibility for salmon and freshwater fisheries policy matters exercised by the National Assembly, the Environment Agency has a statutory duty to maintain, improve and develop salmon and freshwater fisheries in Wales up to six miles from the coast. In marine protection duties, the agency is assisted by sea fisheries committees, with their respective officers working together to enforce fisheries legislation.

Assembly officials participate in UK-level meetings that address wider management issues, such as the effects on salmon and trout stocks of high seas fisheries off southern Ireland and in the North Atlantic, and the effects of global warming and marine pollution.

I am advised that brown trout do not exist in the marine environment.

Questions 7 (OAQ12747), 8 (OAQ12741), 11 (OAQ12753), 18 (OAQ12773) and 20 (OAQ12691) were answered in Plenary.

Questions 9 (OAQ12743), 10 (OAQ12699), 12 (OAQ12744), 13 (OAQ12697), 14 (OAQ12768), 15 (OAQ12745) and 16 (OAQ12718) withdrawn.

Marketing Welsh Farm Produce

Q17 Alison Halford: Would the Minister make a statement on how much the Assembly has spent on marketing Welsh farm produce in the UK and abroad in the last financial year? (OAQ12796) **Transferred for written answer.**

Carwyn Jones: The Welsh Development Agency Food Directorate has direct responsibility for food promotion in Wales. Its role is to lead economic development in the agri-food sector and to promote Welsh food. In 2000/01 £3.8 million of the WDA grant in aid provided by the Assembly was allocated to agri-food developments, with over £1.8 million being directed towards food promotion. A further £600,000 was secured by the WDA from European funding. In addition, £2 million was allocated to the marketing development scheme and the processing and marketing grant scheme.

Questions 19 (OAQ12767), 21 (OAQ12766) and 22 (OAQ12698) withdrawn.

Facilitating the Recovery of Farming in Wales

Q23 Peter Rogers: How does the Minister propose to facilitate the recovery of farming in Wales after the foot and mouth disease crisis? (OAQ12752) [R]

Carwyn Jones: There are no easy solutions in moving forward from foot and mouth disease. As a starting point, the agriculture industry and wider rural community will look for leadership and a future direction for farming as it faces up to the challenges ahead.

This will be provided in the report of the Farming Futures group, which I plan to release next month. I look forward to working in partnership with all the key interests to create a better future for our farmers, as well as to benefit the countryside and consumers.

Measures to Prevent the Demise of the Agriculture Sector in Wales

Q24 Alun Cairns: What new measures does the Minister propose to introduce to prevent the demise of the agriculture sector in Wales? (OAQ12782)

Carwyn Jones: There are no easy solutions to the deep-seated problems facing farmers in Wales, which pre-date foot and mouth disease. The status quo is not an option.

Last year, I established the Farming Futures group to prepare a strategy, and supporting programme of action, which would provide the framework for a sustainable agriculture industry in the longer term. The group's report will be released next month.

Welfare Disposal Plans

Q25 Eleanor Burnham: Has the Minister met with European officials to discuss welfare disposal plans in Wales for this autumn? (OAQ12780)

Carwyn Jones: No, as operational responsibility for the livestock welfare disposal scheme, including the extension to cover light lambs, lies with the intervention board (from 1 November the Rural Payments Agency).

Farm Woodland Grant Schemes

Q26 Glyn Davies: How many hectares in Wales benefit from farm woodland grant schemes? (OAQ12774)

Carwyn Jones: Between 1988 and 1992, 388 hectares of land were entered into the farm woodland scheme. The farm woodland premium scheme opened to applications on 1 April 1992 and, from then until 31 March 2001, 2,771 hectares of land had been entered into the scheme.

Quality of Meat Imports to Wales

Q27 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement outlining any discussions that he has held with either representatives of UK supermarket chains or the Westminster Government concerning the quality of meat imports to Wales? (OAQ12748)

Carwyn Jones: Responsibility for the safety of food lies primarily with the Minister for Health and Social Services, advised by the Food Standards Agency. I have not had any meetings with colleagues in Westminster or with representatives of UK supermarkets to discuss meat imports. However, all meat imports, whether from inside or outside the European Union, must be produced in accordance with EU rules on hygiene and BSE. Agriculture departments are responsible for the control of meat imports and other products of animal origin. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been leading a cross-Government working group, established to review enforcement, on which the FSA is represented. A number of measures have already been taken as a result of the group's work.

Question 28 (OAQ12770) withdrawn.

LEADER+ Programme

Q29 Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the LEADER+ programme? (OAQ12754)

Carwyn Jones: LEADER+ is the European Union's community initiative for rural development. The European Commission approved the Wales LEADER+ single programming document on 2 July and, on 10 July, I announced the seven successful Welsh local action groups. The Programme Monitoring Committee approved the programme complement on 2 October and the Welsh European Funding Office and the Welsh Development Agency are working with the successful groups to formulate their business plans. The deadline for submission of business plans to WEFO was 15 October. Approval of the business plans will also determine the financial allocations.

The successful groups were:

- Cadwyn Clwyd (rural Denbighshire and Flintshire)
- Menter Môn (rural Anglesey)
- Glasu (rural Powys)
- SPARC/PLANED (rural Pembrokeshire)
- Rural Conwy
- Northern Marches (rural Wrexham)
- Adventa (rural Monmouthshire).

Question 30 (OAQ12742) withdrawn.

Questions to the Minister for Assembly Business

The National Assembly's ICT Strategy

Q1 Christine Gwyther: Can the Minister make a statement on the delivery of the National Assembly's information and communications technology strategy in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire? (OAQ12712) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Minister for Assembly Business (Andrew Davies): Cymru Ar-lein will be delivered in Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, as elsewhere, through a variety of mechanisms. These will include the provision of free ICT support and advice to local businesses through the Pembroke Business Connect centre and low-cost internet access through University for Industry cyswllt dysgu/learn direct centres. In addition, the Assembly recently approved Pembrokeshire's bid for creating ICT learning centres in all eight of its secondary schools and a range of community venues, as part of the ICT for learning strategy. We are currently considering further proposals for local projects to extend access to ICT in Communities First areas.

Questions 2 (OAQ12723), 3 (OAQ12795) and 6 (OAQ12709) withdrawn.

Questions 4 (OAQ12707), 5 (OAQ12710) and 7 (OAQ12778) were answered in Plenary.

Greater Access to the Internet

Q8 Christine Gwyther: What measures are in place to provide greater access to the internet for the Welsh general public? (OAQ12714) *Transferred for written answer.*

Andrew Davies: Our plans are to improve access to affordable, high-bandwidth network infrastructure, making a particular difference in rural areas. As the first step in the Assembly's plan for broadband in Wales, a broadband for lifelong learning package of £18.5 million this year and £6 million each following year has been agreed. This will provide broadband access in each local authority and enhanced multimedia equipment in schools.

Convenient and accessible internet access for everyone will be provided via public libraries, cyswllt dysgu/learn direct centres and complementary ICT learning centres based in schools and community venues. By January 2002, we will provide a list of 400 learning centres across Wales providing bilingual ICT facilities to the public.

We are establishing a major e-communities programme to develop ICT skills and understanding, leading to a greater demand, which will lead to wider access through the private sector.

Also, through the Assembly's activities and methods, we will promote Welsh-medium internet facilities and web pages to avoid creating a digital divide due to language.

Questions 9 (OAQ12736), 10 (OAQ12737) and 13 (OAQ12706) were answered in Plenary.

Questions 11 (OAQ12756) and 12 (OAQ12757) withdrawn.

Promoting Wales Abroad (ICT Policy)

Q14 Nick Bourne: How is the information and communications technology policy being used to promote Wales abroad? (OAQ12708)

Andrew Davies: Promoting Wales internationally is a key priority for the Cabinet. A package of promotional and marketing material about Wales was launched on St David's Day this year. The material includes an interactive CD-ROM and the 'Wales.World Nation' website, and the package is being further developed.

We also plan to develop a Wales portal service. This will play a pivotal role in presenting services and information across the globe.

The National Library of Wales is already developing key aspects of this through 'Wales on the web', which will be a first point of entry for all levels of inquiry on Welsh topics, and the Gathering the Jewels project. The National Assembly will continue to work with the national library and other key partners to identify and develop a suitable service to meet our key objective.

Question 15 (OAQ12722) withdrawn.

Growth of Broadband Services in Wales

Q16 Alun Cairns: What measures is the Minister taking to facilitate the growth of broadband services in Wales? (OAQ12777)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly has sought to facilitate the growth of supply of and demand for broadband services. Our support for projects such as Llwybr/Pathway strand 6 and the multi-agency rural area network (MARAN) project has improved the supply of broadband services. In relation to the demand for broadband services, projects such as OpportunitE Wales and the network of ICT support centres have an important role to play in raising awareness among small and medium-sized enterprises of the considerable benefits of broadband technologies.

Furthermore, the ubiquitous broadband infrastructure study published in July identified a number of recommendations to optimise the use of structural and other funds to improve the availability of broadband technologies. A detailed implementation plan is due to be presented to the Assembly Cabinet in the near future.

Computer Access in Welsh Libraries

Q17 Nick Bourne: What progress has been made in increasing the level of computer access in Welsh libraries? (OAQ12711)

Andrew Davies: We have provided £6.5 million, through the new opportunities fund, for the people's ICT network in public libraries. NOF has received computer network plans from all 22 local authorities. All public libraries, where practicable, should be online by the end of 2002, and the number of computer terminals in Welsh public libraries will rise from about 200 to some 2,000. In addition, £870,000 has been allocated for ICT training for public library staff and NOF has approved all 22 ICT training plans. Our recently announced broadband for lifelong learning package will build on this initiative by establishing links from local authorities to public libraries and provide faster access at 8 megabits per second bandwidth.

Developing ICT Links with Europe

Q18 John Griffiths: What strategy will be followed to enable Wales to develop ICT links with Europe and the European regions? (OAQ12798)

Andrew Davies: Co-operation between European regions is an essential requirement of European funding, and we are encouraging organisations in Wales to work with partners on practical projects. Work in this area will include improving availability of information on potential partners by providing a discussion forum on European funding via the Cymru Ar-lein site. My presidency of the TeleRegions

Network provides a further opportunity for Wales to forge stronger links with other European regions and other regional networks. The TeleRegions Network provides an opportunity to share the experiences of other regions and to make our voice heard at a European level.

Question 19 (OAQ12715) withdrawn.

Access to the Internet (Long-term Benefits to Wales)

Q20 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the long-term benefits to Wales resulting from a greater number of households in Wales having access to the internet? (OAQ12735)

Andrew Davies: Individuals and families who have access to the internet in their homes will be able to benefit from a variety of learning opportunities, information and online services provided by businesses and the public sector. They will be able to engage in teleworking or make their work patterns more flexible, enhancing family life and leading to long-term benefits for the community and the environment. Internet access in the home will also provide opportunities for people to develop their ICT skills, enabling them to develop Welsh businesses and communities using the technology. If enough people in Wales choose, and are enabled, to get online, this will develop an internal e-market, of skills and customers, which will enable Welsh businesses to grow and develop their use of e-commerce. This, in turn, will enable these businesses to take advantage of global markets, where e-commerce is a requirement. The key long-term benefit of a greater number of households being online is its contribution to the sustainable development of Wales.

Question 21 (OAQ12713) withdrawn.