

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 29 February 2000

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

Questions to the First Secretary

Social Exclusion (Reforming Public Expenditure Policy)

Phil Williams: What aspects of public expenditure policy will the First Secretary ask the Treasury, through the appropriate channels, to reform in order to speed up the reduction of social exclusion in Wales? (OAQ3726)

The First Secretary: I have already met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and discussed a range of issues concerned with public expenditure in Wales. I took the opportunity to emphasise the importance of improving the performance of Wales in order to reduce social exclusion.

Social Exclusion (Promoting the 'Knowledge Economy')

Q7 Geraint Davies: How will the First Secretary ensure that plans to promote the 'knowledge economy' will not worsen social exclusion in the Valleys? (OAQ3723)

The First Secretary: Promoting social inclusion and equality of opportunity are top priorities for the Assembly. We, and our central Government colleagues, are determined to do our utmost to avoid a 'digital divide' between information communication technology 'haves' and 'have-nots'. We are making available £18 million over three years to support a wide-ranging education ICT strategy that will widen access to computers and the internet. Detailed proposals will be announced shortly. In addition, we expect the University for Industry and the Wales Digital College to stimulate the demand for lifelong learning among businesses and individuals in all areas of Wales and to promote the availability of and access to learning, particularly through the use of information and communication technology. Furthermore, digital broadcasting opens up the possibility of new information services, convergence of TV and internet technologies in the long term.

'A Better Wales' (Economic Needs)

Q8 Brian Hancock: How are the specific economic needs of Wales reflected and addressed in the Government's strategic plan, 'A Better Wales'? (OAQ3721)

The First Secretary: The draft version of 'A Better Wales' has been developed alongside the national economic development strategy. It includes an analysis of our economy and a 30-point action plan designed to build on our strengths and address areas of weakness. Consultation ends on 3 March and, following a debate within the Assembly, we are committed to publish the final plan by the end of that month.

Hybu'r Broses Ddatganoli

C9 Owen John Thomas: Beth y mae'r Prif Ysgrifennydd yn bwriadu ei wneud i alluogi'r Cynulliad i hybu'r broses ddatganoli? (OAQ3713)

Y Prif Ysgrifennydd: Fel y dywedais yn y Cyfarfod Llawn ar 15 Chwefror, y dasg yw defnyddio pwerau'r Cynulliad mewn modd adeiladol a chydweithredol a fydd yn ennyn sêl bendith holl bobl Cymru. Nid tasg i mi yn unig yw hyn—mae gan bob Aelod ran i'w chwarae.

Promoting the Devolution Process

Q9 Owen John Thomas: What will the First Secretary do to enable the Assembly to promote the process of devolution? (OAQ3713)

The First Secretary: As I said in Plenary on 15 February, the task must be to use the Assembly's powers constructively and co-operatively in a way that will resonate with all the people of Wales. That is not just my task—every member has a role to play.

Welsh Input in European-wide Strategy for Social Issues

Q10 Dafydd Wigley: How does the First Secretary plan to ensure a Welsh input to the development of a Europe-wide strategy for fighting social exclusion, reducing poverty and ending the disparities between Europe's regions and territories? (OAQ3728)

The First Secretary: The structural funds programmes, once agreed with the European Commission, together with our domestically funded regeneration programmes, are aimed to improve levels of prosperity in Wales and bring them closer to the European average.

The Assembly is committed to an action plan to promote social inclusion in Wales that will contain challenging targets for economic development and the improvement of public services. To develop targets we have commissioned Oxford University to produce an index of deprivation for Wales, which will provide better information at a local level.

Objective 1 (Discussions with Treasury Ministers)

Q11 Nick Bourne: Will the First Secretary report on any progress in discussions with Treasury Ministers regarding match funding for Objective 1 purposes? (OAQ3705)

The First Secretary: I have had useful discussions with the Chief Secretary about a wide range of financial issues which are of concern to Wales, including the financial implications of Objective 1.

Re-negotiating the Fontainebleau Rebate Agreement (Representations to the Treasury)

Q12 Elin Jones: Has the First Secretary made any representations to the Treasury on the need to re-negotiate the Fontainebleau rebate agreement? (OAQ3722)

The First Secretary: No. The Fontainebleau rebate is an arrangement whereby the UK Government's net contribution to the EU is reduced. It is not a devolved matter.

Encouraging Business Partnerships with Young People

Q13 Jocelyn Davies: How does the First Secretary plan to encourage business partnership with young people? (OAQ3717) *Withdrawn.*

Wind-up of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (Financial Implications for the Assembly)

Q14 Glyn Davies: What are the overall financial implications to the Assembly of Cardiff City and County Council taking over the running of Cardiff Bay and the barrage after the wind-up of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation? (OAQ3707)

The First Secretary: The Assembly's objective is to contain succession funding within the grant in aid baseline of £17.4 million for 2000-01, any agreed carry over for uncompleted projects, and £23.9 million in each later year.

Adjusting the Barnett Formula

Q15 Michael German: What discussions has the First Secretary had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding the need to adjust the Barnett formula in order for the Assembly to pursue its policy priorities more effectively? (OAQ3708)

The First Secretary: I have regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Wales to discuss a wide range of issues affecting Wales, including financial issues. There are currently no plans to adjust the Barnett formula.

Raising the Profile and Image of St David's Day

Q16 Janet Davies: How does the First Secretary intend to raise the profile and image of 1 March as a Welsh national day? (OAQ3718)

The First Secretary: St David's Day already has a well-established profile and image. It provides an important focus for national expressions of patriotism and pride in our distinctive culture and language and no-one who lives in Wales can doubt that 1 March is the celebration of Saint David, the patron saint of Wales. Throughout Wales, St David's Day is celebrated in schools and local communities.

I see St David's Day as a vehicle for promoting the image of Wales overseas. I have no doubt that this will continue to be a feature of the measures we intend to take to raise the profile of Wales overseas. This year the Wales Tourist Board is involved in a range of profile-raising events on or around 1 March in India, the USA, Australia and Europe (including other parts of the United Kingdom). The Wales European Centre is arranging a series of events around St David's Day in Brussels and the Welsh Development Agency has events planned in London, Paris and Hollywood.

Enhancing the Celebration of St David's Day

Q17 William Graham: What plans does the First Secretary have to enhance the celebration of our land's patron saint? (OAQ3725)

The First Secretary: St David's Day already has a well-established profile and image. It provides an important focus for national expressions of patriotism and pride in our distinctive culture and language and no-one who lives in Wales can have any doubt that 1 March is the celebration of Saint David, the patron saint of Wales. Throughout Wales, St David's day is celebrated in schools and local communities.

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European Centre is arranging a series of events around Saint David's Day in Brussels and the Welsh Development Agency has events planned in London, Paris and Hollywood.

Reviewing the Barnett Formula

Q18 Peter Black: Will the First Secretary make representations to the UK Government through the Secretary of State for Wales to ask it to review the Barnett formula? (OAQ3683)

The First Secretary: I have no plans to seek a review of the Barnett formula at the present time.

National Culture and The Welsh Language

Q19 Cynog Dafis: Will the First Secretary make a statement on the need to develop a new and distinctive policy agenda to promote the profile and awareness of our national culture and the Welsh language? (OAQ3720)

The First Secretary: The Post-16 Education and Training Committee's review of arts and cultural policy in Wales will examine the Assembly's current policy, priorities, expenditure and objectives. I understand that the report is due to be completed in July 2000 and I look forward to seeing what recommendations the Committee offers in terms of the development of a national cultural policy.

The Assembly plans to continue with distinctive policies in support of the Welsh language. We shall do this in the light of the recent statement by the Post-16 Education and Training Committee that it supports the objective of creating a bilingual Wales as an achievable national aim.

The Waterhouse Report

Q20 Alison Halford: Following the publication of the Waterhouse report, what steps will the First Secretary take to ensure that such events do not recur in Wales? (OAQ3695)

The First Secretary: We need to consider the tribunal's recommendations in the light of the significant changes which have already taken place to ensure the safety and welfare of children in care. The Children Act 1989 and the Protection of Children Act 1999 are already on the statute book and the Government's Care Standards Bill and Children (Leaving Care) Bill anticipate many of the tribunal's recommendations.

In Wales, we are already taking action to implement the recommendations of Sir William Utting's Children's Safeguards Review. We shall look again at current programmes of action to see what more may be required to ensure, as far as we can, that there is no recurrence of the appalling events described in the tribunal's report. As a first step, the Under-16 Education Committee and the Health and Social Services Committee will be meeting in early March to discuss the key issues and how the Assembly might set about tackling them. We shall follow up the Committees' discussions with a full debate in Plenary.

Facilitating the Audit of the Cost of Living in Wales

Q21 John Griffiths: What action will the First Secretary take to facilitate an audit of the cost of living in Wales to establish the minimum incomes required to enable people 'to live inclusive lives'? (OAQ3699)

The First Secretary: Any comparisons of the relative cost of living would need to be compiled on a consistent UK basis. Changes in the cost of living are reflected in the UK retail prices index, which is

compiled by the Office for National Statistics. Estimates for Wales are not available separately but we understand that the ONS is proposing to consult users of regional statistics on their needs and priorities.

Promoting Active Citizenship (Young People)

Q22 Richard Edwards: What plans does the First Secretary have to promote the concept of active citizenship among the young people of Wales? (OAQ3696)

The First Secretary: The Assembly has in place a range of initiatives that promote active citizenship among young people. I refer you to my answer to Ann Jones to OAQ3179 on 1 February.

In addition, today sees the launch of the Timebank—a concept with considerable potential, which has been developed by a group of voluntary organisations together with the BBC, to encourage people to give their time. On Thursday 2 March, Jane Hutt will be addressing a convention of volunteers in Cardiff about promoting volunteering in Wales under the theme of the active community.

Guidance on Councillors' Allowances

Q23 David Melding: Has the Partnership Council discussed the implementation of guidance regarding councillors' allowances in Wales? (OAQ3714) *Withdrawn.*

Social Exclusion (Core Services Funding)

Q24 Mick Bates: In recognising the need to tackle social exclusion in Wales, what discussions has the First Secretary had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding the funding of core services in Wales? (OAQ3729)

The First Secretary: I have regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Wales to discuss a wide range of issues affecting Wales. These include financial matters and the priorities set out in the Assembly's draft strategic plan, which incorporates social inclusion.

Wind-up of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (Financial Implications for the Assembly)

Q25 Alun Cairns: What are the overall financial implications for the Assembly of the maintenance and running of Cardiff Bay and the barrage, after the wind-up of Cardiff Bay Development Corporation? (OAQ3694)

The First Secretary: The Assembly's objective is to contain succession funding within the grant in aid baseline of £17.4 million for 2000-01, any agreed carry over for uncompleted projects, and £23.9 million in each later year.

Barnett Formula (Welsh Block Grant)

Q26 Christine Humphreys: What discussions has the First Secretary had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding the continued use of the Barnett formula for the calculation of the Welsh block grant? (OAQ3730)

The First Secretary: I have regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Wales to discuss a wide range of issues affecting Wales, including all financial issues. There are currently no plans to change the funding arrangements for Wales.

Allgáu Cymdeithasol ('Gwell Cymru')

C27 Helen Mary Jones: Sut y bydd y fframwaith polisi a amlinellir yn 'Gwell Cymru' yn ymafael â'r problemau penodol o anffodlonrwydd ac allgáu cymdeithasol ymysg pobl ifanc yng Nghymru? (OAQ3716)

Y Prif Ysgrifennydd Mae 'Gwell Cymru' yn cynnwys llawer o ffyrdd o ddelio ag allgáu cymdeithasol ymhlith pobl ifanc. Fe gyfeiriaf isod at rai o'r engeifftiau mwyaf arwyddocaol.

Maent yn cynnwys gweithgareddau wedi'u hanelu at wella cyrhaeddiad, cefnogi teuluoedd a chymunedau, yn unol â meincnodau 'Cymru 2010' ar ddysgu a dinasyddiaeth. Fe'u ceir ar dudalen 12 y ddogfen. Mae'r rhain yn cynnwys mentrau i wella mynediad at addysg a hyfforddiant a chyfranogiad mewn addysg a hyfforddiant, a fydd yn sicrhau bod pob person ifanc sy'n gadael yr ysgol yn mynd i addysg bellach ac uwch neu'n cael hyfforddiant mewn gwaith. Ceir manylion pellach ynglyn â'r mentrau hyn ar dudalen 16, lle ceir disgrifiad o'r camau i'w cymryd gan Yrfaedd Cymru a'r Cynllun Porth Ieuencid ac ystod o gynigion i'w gweithredu gan y Cyngor Cenedlaethol dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant newydd, rhaglen prentisiaethau modern estynedig a lleoliadau ychwanegol ar gyfer myfyrwyr dan ddarpariaethau newydd y cronfeydd mynediad.

Rhoddir pwyslais sylweddol ar gynnwys pobl ifanc wrth wneud penderfyniadau. Bydd y dull strategol o ddelio â gwasanaethau i blant a phobl ifanc yn sefydlu fframwaith cydlynol i werthoedd ac egwyddorion ar gyfer cynllunio a chyflwyno gwasanaethau. Yn rhan o'r trefniadau cynllunio ar gyfer cyflwyno'r strategaeth ceir trefniadau ar gyfer cynnwys pobl ifanc yn lleol yn y broses gynllunio.

Mae'r adran ar hybu dinasyddiaeth weithredol, creadigrwydd a mentergarwch ar dudalen 16 hefyd yn cyfeirio at waith uned bolisi'r Cynulliad, sy'n cynnal astudiaeth ar hyn o bryd ymhlith pobl ifanc ar bennu ffyrdd o wella dulliau lleol o roi cefnogaeth, cyngor a chyfarwyddyd i bobl ifanc.

Ceir camau hefyd, yn unol â'r amlinelliad a geir ar dudalen 17, i annog pobl ifanc o gefndiroedd wedi'u hallgáu i roi mwy o lais i bobl ifanc a'u hannog i gymryd rhan, er enghraifft trwy fentrau fel Young Voice/Llais Ifanc a mwy o gyfleoedd ymgynghori trwy'r fewnrwyd. Mae'n bwysig bod barn a dymuniadau pobl ifanc sydd wedi'u hallgáu yn cael eu hystyried yn llawn.

Mae Pennod 5, 'Gwell Economi, Economi Gryfach', yn cyfeirio at elfennau o'r Fargen Newydd a bydd yn cynorthwyo 30,000 o bobl ifanc dan 25 i symud oddi wrth fudd-daliadau at waith. Mae hefyd yn disgrifio gwaith i'w wneud mewn ardaloedd difreintiedig dan Amcan 1 i ostwng lefelau diweithdra ac anweithgarwch ymhlith pobl ifanc a lleiafrifoedd croenddu ac ethnig.

Nodir anghenion pobl ifanc mewn gofal ym mhennod 6 yn y sylwadau ynglyn ag ymrwymiad i wella lles a chyrhaeddiad addysgol ac amddiffyn unigolion yn unol â'r rhaglen Plant yn Gyntaf. Rhoddir mwy o flaenoriaeth i'r anghenion hyn wrth benodi comisiynydd plant i fod yn gyfrifol am siarad ar ran hawliau plant Cymru.

Ym mhennod 7, ceir cyfeiriadau at droseddau gan bobl ifanc a'r angen i rwystro pobl ifanc rhag ymddwyn yn anghymdeithasol. Fe nodir rôl Cronfa Partneriaeth Plant ac Ieuencid—sef £25 miliwn—sydd yn cefnogi sefydlu cynlluniau lleol i gynnig gweithgareddau adeiladol i'r perwyl hwn.

Ceir camau pellach ar droseddau pobl ifanc ac allgáu cymdeithasol yn gynt yn y cynllun. Mae meincnod 13 ar dudalen 13 yn cyfeirio at lefelau camddefnyddio sylweddau ymhlith pobl ifanc, ac fe ymdrinnir â hynny yn strategaeth camddefnyddio sylweddau Cymru, a fydd yn cael ei lansio maes o law. Nod y gwaith hwn yw adeiladu ar y gwaith da sydd eisoes wedi'i wneud yng Nghymru, a bydd yn cynnal

pwyslais ar gynorthwyo plant a phobl ifanc i wrthod camddefnyddio sylweddau er mwyn cyflawni eu llawn botensial mewn cymdeithas.

Yr wyf wedi ceisio rhoi blas ar yr amrediad mentrau sydd yn rhan o 'Gwell Cymru', sy'n dangos y pwysigrwydd yr wyf yn ei roi ar fodloni anghenion pobl ifanc sy'n byw ar yr ymylon, a'r ffyrdd ymarferol o ymateb o ddifrif i anfonlonrwydd yr ifanc.

Social Exclusion ('A Better Wales')

Q27 Helen Mary Jones: How will the policy framework outlined in 'A Better Wales' tackle the particular problems of social exclusion and disaffection amongst young people in Wales? (OAQ3716)

The First Secretary: 'A Better Wales' includes many ways in which social exclusion among the young will be addressed. I refer to some of the most significant examples below.

They include activities aimed at raising attainment supporting families and communities, as outlined in the 'Wales 2010' benchmarks on learning and citizenship on page 12 of the document. Among these are initiatives to improve access to and participation in education and training that will ensure that all young people leaving school will enter further and higher education or take up training in employment. These initiatives are detailed further on page 16 where action taken by the Careers Wales and the Youth Gateway Scheme and a range of proposals to be undertaken by the new National Council for Education and Training, the expanded modern apprenticeship programme and additional placements for student under the new provision for access funds are described.

Considerable emphasis is placed on involvement of young people in decision-making. The strategic approach to services for children and young people will set up a coherent framework of values and principles for the planning and delivery of services. Included in the planning arrangements for delivery of the strategy will be arrangements for involvement of young people in planning processes locally.

The section on promotion of active citizenship, creativity and entrepreneurship on page 16 also refers to the work of the Assembly's policy unit which is currently undertaking a study involving young people in determining ways of improving local mechanisms for the delivery of support, advice and guidance to young people.

Steps are also being taken, as outlined on page 17, to encourage young people from excluded backgrounds to participate more and have their voices heard, for example through initiatives such as Young Voice/Llais Ifanc and increased involvement in consultations on the internet. It is important that the opinions and wishes of excluded young people are fully taken into account in this way.

Chapter 5, 'A Better, Stronger Economy' refers to the elements of the New Deal that will help 30,000 under 25 year olds leave benefit for work. It also describes work to be undertaken in deprived areas under Objective 1 to reduce unemployment and inactivity among young people and black and ethnic minorities.

The needs of young people in care are highlighted in Chapter 6, where the commitment to improving well-being and educational attainment and safeguarding individuals as embodied in the Children First programme are highlighted. These needs will be given greater priority in the appointment of a children's commissioner to have responsibility for 'championing children's rights' in Wales.

References to youth crime and the need to divert young people away from anti-social behaviour are contained in Chapter 7, which notes the role of the £25 million Children and Youth Partnership Fund that is supporting the establishment of local plans aimed at providing constructive activities for this purpose.

Further action on youth crime and exclusion is covered earlier in the plan. Benchmark 13 on page 13 refers to the levels of substance misuse among young people that is currently being addressed in the refocused Welsh substance misuse strategy, which is to be launched shortly. This approach aims to build on the good work that has already been done in Wales and will maintain an emphasis on helping children and young people to resist substance misuse so that they can achieve their full potential in society.

I have tried here to give a flavour of the range of initiatives included in the 'A Better Wales' plan that illustrate the importance that I place upon meeting the needs of marginalised young people, and the many practical ways in which disaffection among the young is being taken seriously and addressed.

Developing a Communications Strategy (Cabinet Policy and Decision-making)

Q28 Sue Essex: Does the First Secretary intend to develop a communications strategy which would enable the people of Wales to be better informed on policy development and decision-making by the Cabinet at the Assembly? (OAQ3731) *Withdrawn.*

Social Exclusion (Abolition of Dairy Hygiene Charges)

Q29 David Davies: What effect will the abolition of dairy hygiene charges have on social exclusion in rural areas? (OAQ3698)

The First Secretary: Social inclusion is one of the major themes running through the 'A Better Wales' plan and it has guided policy and action on everything from the economy to health. That said, lifting dairy hygiene inspection charges in Wales—assuming we can overcome the problem of state aids—would make only a marginal difference to dairy farmers' income. It would, however, send out an important positive signal to the industry.

The Assembly is also taking action to help the dairy sector through the agri-food strategy. In addition to the processing grants announced previously for Aeron Valley Cheese and Associated Creameries at Llangadog, the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development announced processing grants for three other dairy plants in January: Associated Creameries' plant at Llandyrnog in north Wales, Ash Manor Cheese Company Ltd at Wrexham, and Llanboidy Cheese. The total value of these grants is £2,240,945. This is the sort of action that will help Welsh dairying to compete and survive.