

Information Further to Ministerial Answers

Information further to a Statement on the Assembly's Arrangements for Co-operation with Business issued by Andrew Davies, the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks, in June 2006

To Christine Chapman:

During the Plenary debate on 24 May on the Assembly's arrangements for co-operation with business you raised a number of points on the Welsh Assembly Government's influence on disability and business issues. I am writing to you in response.

My Enterprise, Innovation and Networks Department actively supports the Social Enterprise Strategy. We are committed to improving the quality of business support available to social enterprises. In the last financial year (2005/06), 208 business advisers and client managers attended 2-day workshops to improve their understanding of the support needs of social enterprises. Further courses will be held this year as required.

In the same period, under our New Business Starts programme, we provided support through the Wales Co-operative Centre to establish 20 new social enterprises. Twelve of these are located in the West Wales and the Valleys area.

Two 2-day masterclasses for leaders of social enterprises were held in February this year in Caernarfon and Ammanford. These were led by the inspirational expert on social enterprise, Jerr Boschee, founder of the Institute of Social Entrepreneurs in Minnesota. Seventy-five leaders of Welsh social enterprises attended these events and 10 organisations had one-to-one consultations.

Tendering for public sector contracts is a major source of new opportunities and business growth for social enterprises. 56 enterprises are registered on the sell2wales website and later this year we will be providing 4 specialist workshops for social enterprises who wish to improve their tendering skills.

The SME Equality Project has worked with over 2,000 small and medium sized enterprises in Wales. The purpose of this Project is to facilitate the valuing of diversity in the workplace in SMEs in Wales. After undertaking a period of development with the Project, companies are used as exemplars of best practice. These exemplars are used to encourage other, similar organisations of the benefits of employing people from a diverse range of backgrounds and from all demographic groups. The main equality strands which form the focus of the work of the Project are: disability, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion and belief, age, welsh language, size and ex-offenders.

In addition, the Assembly Government has worked closely with Department for Work and Pensions in the development of the 'Pathways to Work' initiative, which is being piloted in Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taf to new and existing customers to incapacity benefit. The pilots are fully funded by DWP, including a 'Condition Management Programme' run by the NHS, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, which offers work focussed specialist health help and support.

Additional pilot areas commenced from April 2006 are South West Wales Jobcentre Plus District, covering Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire and Swansea; and from October, South Wales Valleys Jobcentre Plus District, which as well as covering the current pilot area, will also include Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Merthyr Tydfil local authority areas.

Want2Work is a joint Assembly Government/Jobcentre Plus Wales initiative, developed to help those people already claiming benefit (principally, but not exclusively, Incapacity Benefit), who express an interest in finding work, to move voluntarily into sustained employment. Want2Work offers specialist Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser support and an enhanced financial package that includes a Job Preparation Premium and a Return to Work Credit. For those with a work limiting health problem who find work, there is access to advice from a health professional working alongside Jobcentre Plus advisers.

Information further to the response to the Short Debate entitled ‘Engaging the Youth of Today: Votes at 16?’ issued by Christine Chapman, the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, in June 2006

To Peter Black:

During the Plenary debate, Engaging the Youth of Today: Votes at 16?, on 24 May, you raised the possibility of visiting the Isle of Man to monitor the effect of the recent legislative change there which allows 16 and 17 year olds to vote.

The legislation Registration of Electors Bill has passed through all the necessary stages in the Tynwald in the Isle of Man and has now passed to the Department of Constitutional Affairs to gain Royal Assent. It is however by no means certain that Royal Assent will be gained in time for the next general election to the House of Keys. This is timed for November 2006.

If legislation is promulgated in time, I will ask my officials to produce a report on the Isle of Man experience after the November elections.