

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 28 February 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 Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language

Participation of Women in Sport

Q6 Christine Chapman: Will the Minister give an update on the participation of women in sport in Wales? (OAQ15890)

The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language (Jenny Randerson): I am determined to see the level of women participating in sport increase. This issue is reflected in many of the initiatives being introduced by the Sports Council for Wales, for example the women and girl's action plan, the girl's first initiative and the golf development plan.

The sports council is working hard to achieve its overall target, which is to halve the gap between men's and women's participation by the year 2005. It is currently collating data in order to analyse progress being made.

Question 7 (OAQ15871) withdrawn.

Leisure Facilities for Disabled People

Q8 William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement on the access to and availability of recreational sport and leisure facilities for the disabled people in our communities? (OAQ15872)

Jenny Randerson: I want everyone in Wales, disabled or non-disabled, regardless of age, ability or gender, to have the opportunity to take part in sport.

The Assembly Government's policies, implemented through the Sports Council for Wales, give particular focus to disabled participation in sport with schemes such as the disability Cymru initiative. Disabled access to sport and leisure facilities is governed by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and all operators of leisure venues must comply with the Act.

Office of Communications Bill

Q9 Gareth Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the impact of the proposed Office of Communications Bill on the Welsh public? (OAQ15885)

Jenny Randerson: The Office of Communications Bill, which will be given its third reading at the House of Commons in early March, will have no direct impact on the Welsh public. It is limited to establishing the Office of Communications as a legal entity so that it can prepare itself for the regulatory functions for which it will eventually be responsible.

Financial Assistance Open to Touring Companies

Q10 Janet Davies: How does the financial assistance open to touring companies in Wales compare with that available to companies in England and Scotland? (OAQ15947)

Jenny Randerson: Revenue grants for flagship touring companies in Wales, Scotland and England this year amount to just over £10 million, £13 million and £40 million respectively. For example, the Welsh National Opera will receive £8.3 million this year, compared to £7.6 million for Scottish Opera and £6.7 million for Opera North.

In total, Welsh national remit companies will receive just over £10 million this year. This enables them to carry out a range of touring options from mainscale to chorus, and from education to community outreach. The significant increase in the Arts Council of Wales's budget for 2002-03 will enable the national companies to do even more in future.

Participation in Sport in Disadvantaged Communities

Q11 John Griffiths: What further policies will be developed to promote participation in sports in our most disadvantaged communities? (OAQ15868)

Jenny Randerson: Increasing participation in sport, for all ages, in all areas, is an integral part of the Assembly Government's 'Plan for Wales 2001'. I firmly believe that participation in sport has a key role to play in helping to tackle the problems associated with our most disadvantaged areas and this issue is fundamental to all of the Sports Council development programmes. For example the Sports Council for Wales has established a social inclusion in sport forum with access to up to £8 million of lottery funding over the next five years.

Clwyd Theatr Cymru

Q12 Tom Middlehurst: Will the Minister make a statement on the funding of Clwyd Theatr Cymru? (OAQ15881)

Jenny Randerson: I am pleased to say that following the significant increase in the Arts Council of Wales's budget for the coming financial year, the council's revenue clients are to receive a 15 per cent increase in their funding. For Clwyd Theatr Cymru this means a revenue grant of just over £1.34 million, and redemption of debt for 2002-03. This will allow CTC to continue its current level of productions, to tour twice a year and take its mobile theatre to venues and communities throughout Wales.

Development of Welsh Culture

Q13 Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on what progress is being made in the development of Welsh culture on a uniform basis across the whole of Wales? (OAQ15950)

Jenny Randerson: Good progress is being made in the development of Welsh culture across the board, and the launch of my culture strategy 'Creative Future: Cymru Greadigol' signals this. This is a challenging but achievable 10-year strategy to put cultural issues higher up on the agenda in Wales. To deliver this strategy we must transform our thinking, planning and funding, and as a result, our delivery. If we achieve that, it will result in greater recognition and profile for Wales, with all the wider benefits that that can bring for all the people of Wales.

The increases in the budgets within my portfolio for the coming year are also an indication of the good progress being made in this area. The publishing review, the Culture Committee's Welsh language review and the restructuring of the Arts Council are just some of the examples of the good work being undertaken.

Papur Gwyn ar Ddarlledu a Chyfathrebu

C14 Gareth Jones: Pa sylw a gymerwyd i ymateb Cabinet y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol i'r Papur Gwyn ar ddarlledu a chyfathrebu a gyhoeddwyd y llynedd? (OAQ15884) [W]

Jenny Randerson: Mae swyddogion y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol yn cadw mewn cysylltiad agos â'r swyddogion sy'n cyfateb â hwy yn Whitehall er mwyn sicrhau bod anghenion a phryderon penodol Cymru, a nodwyd yn ymateb Cabinet y Cynulliad, yn cael eu hystyried yn y Mesur Cyfathrebu. Mae'r trafodaethau hyn yn gyfrinachol ar hyn o bryd ond bydd ymgynghori cyhoeddus ar y Mesur Cyfathrebu yn y dyfodol agos.

White Paper on Broadcasting and Communications

Q14 Gareth Jones: What notice has been taken of the National Assembly Cabinet's response to the UK Government's White Paper on broadcasting and communications published last year? (OAQ15884) [W]

Jenny Randerson: Assembly Government officials are liaising closely with counterparts in Whitehall to ensure that particular Welsh needs and concerns, which were reflected in the Assembly Cabinet's response, are taken into account in the Communications Bill. These discussions are currently being conducted in confidence but the Communications Bill will be subject to public consultation in the near future.

Construction of a Swimming Pool in North Wales

Q15 Ann Jones: What discussions has the Minister had regarding the construction of a 50m swimming pool in north Wales? (OAQ15889)

Jenny Randerson: I have not been involved in any discussions regarding the construction of a 50 metre swimming pool in North Wales.

The Sports Council for Wales invited bids for the construction of a national swimming facility from all local authorities in Wales, but none were submitted from North Wales. The successful bid was from University of Wales, and City and County of Swansea Council in partnership.

Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs and Assembly Business

Access to Public Services in Rural Areas

Q2 Ann Jones: What discussions has the Minister had with fellow Ministers on access to public services for people living in rural areas? (OAQ15918) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Assembly Business (Carwyn Jones): I have regular discussions with other Ministers on a range of issues.

Questions 3 to 7 were answered in Plenary.

Farmers Complaints Panel

Q8 David Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the establishment of the farmers complaints panel? (OAQ15955)

Carwyn Jones: There is no 'farmers complaints panel'. Farmers who consider that officials have not handled their case well can have their complaint considered under the Assembly-wide Code of Practice on Complaints, or they can seek a review from the Welsh Administration Ombudsman.

There is a farmers appeals panel which was established on 31 October 2001 as the final stage of the new appeals procedure for farmers in Wales. Farmers can appeal to the panel against decisions taken by officials concerning common agricultural policy main scheme subsidy payments made in respect of the 2001 integrated administration control scheme year and onwards. The appeals panel will take into account the facts of the case and whether officials have applied the scheme rules correctly.

Tir Gofal Scheme

Q9 Glyn Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the future funding of the Tir Gofal scheme? (OAQ15940)

Carwyn Jones: I was very pleased to announce last week that I have secured an additional £1.5million a year for Tir Gofal from next year. This represents an increase of 11 per cent and takes the budget to £15.4 million in 2002-03 and £18.4 million in 2003-04.

Profion am y Diciâu

C10 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad byr ar y naw prawf am y diciâu? (OAQ15964) [W]

Carwyn Jones: Dim ond tri chanlyniad posibl sydd i'r prawf gwahaniaethol safonol am y diciâu mewn gwartheg—pasio'n bendant; methu'n bendant neu ganlyniad amheus. Bydd pasio'n caniatáu ailgydio yn y drefn arferol o brofi'r fuches honno fel sy'n gymwys i'r plwyf arbennig hwnnw. Bydd methiant yn golygu lladd gwartheg yr effeithiwyd arnynt (gyda iawndal) a chynnal prawf eto ymhen 45 i 60 diwrnod. Bydd canlyniad amheus yn golygu y bydd angen cynnal prawf arall ar wartheg amheus unigol neu'r fuches gyfan yn ystod yr un cyfnod os daw nifer sylweddol o ganlyniadau amheus i'r amlwg.

Tests for Tuberculosis

Q10 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will the Minister make a short statement on the nine tests for TB? (OAQ15964) [W]

Carwyn Jones: There are only three possible outcomes to the standard differential test for TB in cattle—conclusive pass, conclusive fail and doubtful. A pass result will allow that herd to regain the frequency of testing applying to that particular parish. A fail result will trigger slaughter of affected cattle (with compensation) and a retest in 45 to 60 days. A doubtful result requires a retest over the same period of either individual suspect cattle, or the whole herd if a significant number of doubtful results are found.

Agri-environmental Schemes

Q11 Dafydd Wigley: Will the Minister make a statement on the future of agri-environmental schemes in Wales? (OAQ15959)

Carwyn Jones: As part of the work which the Assembly Government is co-ordinating to determine our approach to the CAP mid term review, an agri-environment working group has been set up specifically to look at the role of agri-environment schemes and how they can be developed in the future. The Group includes representatives from farming unions, the organic sector, the Environment Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Forestry Commission, National Parks, Wildlife Link and the Young Farmers. The working group will report to me through the CAP reform steering group later this year.

Welsh-branded Produce

Q12 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement on progress in further developing production and marketing of distinctive Welsh-branded produce? (OAQ15909)

Carwyn Jones: The WDA Food Directorate has taken forward a project to develop a clear strategic direction and brand positioning for Welsh food and drink. The aim is to give Welsh products a clear identity, with promotion and marketing geared around 'the true taste'.

Fair Price for Agricultural Produce

Q13 Alison Halford: What action has the Minister taken to ensure all supermarkets in Wales deal fairly with farmers and give them a fair price for their goods? (OAQ15921)

Carwyn Jones: This issue was the subject of an eight-month investigation by the Office of Fair Trading and was then referred to the Competition Commission for a full monopolies inquiry. The Department of Trade and Industry recommended that a binding code of conduct be developed for the industry. The code will enter into force on 17 March 2002.

Animal Welfare Practices

Q14 Brian Gibbons: What role can good animal welfare practices play in promoting the Welsh agriculture industry? (OAQ15917)

Carwyn Jones: The Welsh agriculture industry can only benefit from good animal welfare practices. Wales is currently working with the other UK administrations to implement a number of animal welfare codes, which will improve the quality of Welsh produce alongside assurance schemes such as farm assured Welsh livestock, farm assured Welsh livestock, which promotes good stockmanship and animal husbandry.

Cattle Auctions

Q15 Peter Black: Will the Minister make a statement on the reopening of cattle auctions in Wales? (OAQ15914)

Carwyn Jones: I am delighted that cattle auctions have reopened under new movement of livestock interim arrangements introduced on 11th February. Successful markets have already been held at Carmarthen, Knighton and Dolgellau subject to specific biosecurity conditions within their market operators licence.

In light of experience at these auctions and others over the next few months, I am hopeful that wider marketing opportunities will develop as veterinary disease risk assessments allow.

Questions on Information and Communications Technology to the Minister for Economic Development

BT Ignite Data Centre

Q5 Lorraine Barrett: Will the Minister give a statement on the level of support given to the planned opening of a BT Ignite data centre, which will be in my constituency of Cardiff South and Penarth? (OAQ15904) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Minister for Economic Development (Andrew Davies): Significant regional selective assistance support helped to secure this £ 90 million flagship project for Cardiff, for Wales and for the UK.

For standard reasons of commercial confidentiality, we do not state the level of RSA at this stage but details of individual offers of £75,000 or above are published in 'Labour Market Trends' in the first quarter following payment of the first instalment of the grant.

Question 6 was answered in Plenary.

Relocation of Jobs into Rural Wales

Q7 Brian Hancock: How will the use of ICT help facilitate the relocation of jobs away from the big cities and into rural Wales? (OAQ15970)

Andrew Davies: 'Cymru Ar-lein—Online for a Better Wales' and 'A Winning Wales' sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to spreading and improving prosperity in Wales through making best use of information and communications technology. ICT can facilitate practices such as teleworking and open up markets which were previously not accessible. Location need no longer be an issue and access to ICT can help people make a decision on where they want to live and work.

Through projects such as Strand 6 and the multi-agency rural area network of the Llwybr/Pathway project, the Assembly Government has sought to ensure that broadband telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas is available in parts of Wales where operators would find it commercially unattractive to offer services. Last year, we also announced our plans to develop a lifelong learning network, which will provide high-speed connectivity to schools, learning institutions and libraries throughout Wales. Furthermore, I expect to make an announcement on the way forward in respect of the Analysys action plan soon.

Promoting the use of Broadband Technologies

Q8 Jonathan Morgan: What meetings has the Minister had with the Welsh Development Agency to promote the use of broadband technologies? (OAQ15973)

Andrew Davies: I regularly meet the WDA at both board and official level to discuss a range of issues, including how we can work in partnership to promote the roll-out and take-up of broadband technologies in Wales. Most recently, I met with them on 23 January to discuss the way forward on the Analysys action plan.

This plan will play a central role in helping to decide how best the Assembly delivers its broadband commitments set out in 'Cymru Ar-lein' and 'A Winning Wales'. I expect to make an announcement on how the plan will be taken forward shortly.

Improved Communications Infrastructure

Q9 Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on the development of an improved communications infrastructure across Wales through the use of information and communication technology? (OAQ15968)

Andrew Davies: 'Cymru Ar-lein—Online for a Better Wales' and 'A Winning Wales' set out the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to ensuring that Wales has a modern telecommunications infrastructure that is accessible and affordable for everyone.

The Welsh Assembly Government has supported a range of projects that seek to facilitate this. These include Strand 6 of the Llwybr/Pathway project and MARAN—also part of Llwybr/Pathway. Further

supply and demand projects will be driven forward as part of the Analysys report action plan, which I am currently considering.

Provision for Primary Schools

Q10 Helen Mary Jones: By what date does the Minister anticipate that every primary school will be served by 2 megabytes per second? (OAQ15906)

Andrew Davies: The £18.4 million investment by the Welsh Assembly Government to create a lifelong learning network in Wales will deliver a 100 megabit link into each local authority by July this year. Funding being made available by the Assembly Government from the next financial year will assist local authorities to extend their corporate networks from the 100 megabit link into schools, libraries and ICT learning centres. The timetable for connecting primary schools will be determined by local authorities, depending on local needs and priorities.

Use of ICT amongst the Elderly

Q11 David Melding: How is the Minister encouraging use of ICT among the elderly in Wales? (OAQ15927)

Andrew Davies: The Minister for Health and Social Services has previously announced that the Welsh Assembly Government will develop a strategy for older people in Wales. The strategy steering group has already discussed how ICT is playing an increasing role in communications by older people and also in the delivery of care in the home. The group has agreed that this issue will need to be considered in the strategy findings, which are due in the spring.

As part of 'Cymru Ar-lein' a database has been generated detailing all public access points such as libraries and learning centres. This database includes details of ICT training and assistance available and is currently available in draft format on the 'Cymru Ar-lein' website. It is envisaged that people of all ages will be able to utilise the database to locate local ICT facilities.

Availability of Broadband in South Wales West

Q12 Peter Black: What proposals are in place to expand the availability of broadband in South Wales West in the next financial year? (OAQ15903)

Andrew Davies: South Wales West will benefit from a number of projects next year that will seek to extend the availability of broadband across Wales in line with our commitments in 'Cymru Ar-lein' and 'A Winning Wales'. Specifically:

Broadband lifelong learning network: Last year, we announced a £33 million investment (over the lifetime of the project) to develop a broadband lifelong learning network connecting all learning institutions, learning centres and libraries in Wales to a high capacity backbone network. Specifically £18.4 million was allocated to the project this financial year to purchase multimedia equipment for schools and for the procurement of a high capacity backbone network delivering a 100 megabits per second lifelong learning access point and high-speed internet access into each local authority. Further expenditure of £15 million for the continued development of the network has been committed to over the next three financial years.

Analysis report: This report jointly commissioned by the Welsh Development Agency and the Assembly sets out a series of policy actions that could help stimulate both the demand and supply side of broadband roll-out in Wales. A costed action plan was produced recently and I am currently considering along with my Cabinet colleagues the most appropriate way of taking the report forward. I hope to make an announcement on this shortly.

Objective 1 (priority 2: measure 1): The single programme document and programme complement allocate around £25 million over the current lifetime of the programme (i.e. 2000-2006), to support the further development of ICT infrastructure projects in the Objective 1 area, which includes South Wales West. It is anticipated that a significant proportion of this allocation will be used to support projects identified as part of the Analysis action plan.

Department of Trade and Industry £30 million broadband fund: On a UK basis the DTI has a £30 million fund for innovative broadband projects. A total of £2.67 million from this fund has been allocated to Wales and the vast majority will support our lifelong learning network. We expect the rest to support a broadband wireless pilot.

Cyber Cafés

Q13 William Graham: Will the Minister outline the role of ‘cyber cafés’ in the promotion of information and communication technology in Wales? (OAQ15895)

Andrew Davies: Where established, cyber cafés provide useful internet access points to the public and assist in promoting the use of ICT. As such, they are one of a number of routes individuals without their own facilities can take advantage of the opportunities offered by ICT and the internet.

Promotion of E-business in North Wales

Q14 Alison Halford: Will the Minister make a statement on what has been done to promote e-business in north Wales? (OAQ15974)

Andrew Davies: ‘Cymru Ar-lein—Online for a Better Wales’ details how the Welsh Assembly Government plans to transform the economy of Wales through the application of ICT.

We support a range of projects that involve the promotion of e-commerce and the provision of advice on ICT to businesses. These include Opportunity Wales, the all-Wales network of ICT support centres, the annual e-commerce awards and a commitment to the development of access to broadband technologies.

Opportunity Wales, a large-scale Objective 1 project, will help thousands of businesses benefit from e-commerce. A new Opportunity Wales pilot has recently been agreed for north Wales. Opportunity Wales is not the only e-commerce project running in Wales, but it is the biggest.

As part of our commitment to raising the profile of e-commerce we are co-sponsoring the Welsh heat of the UK online for business/InterForum E-commerce Awards. These awards recognise and reward those organisations that have demonstrated excellence through the use of the internet.

Access to affordable infrastructure is fundamental to driving forward the e-business agenda. Significant strides have been made including support for Strand 6 of the Llwybr/Pathway project that brings ADSL availability to 10 rural towns across Wales, including Bangor, Denbigh, Holyhead and Llandudno in north Wales.

ICT Training for Teachers and Headteachers

Q15 Gareth Jones: What is being done to ensure that all teachers and headteachers in Wales are being given adequate ICT training? (OAQ15969)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly recognises the need for teachers to be confident and competent in the use of technology. We are investing in ICT training for serving teachers through the grants for education support and training programme. Teachers in Wales are also benefiting from the £12.5 million lottery funded ICT training organised by the new opportunities fund. We are currently exploring proposals for

using the £4 million funding for e-learning available next year as part of the Assembly's broadband strategy.

The ICT taskforce for schools will also be asked to explore further ways of improving teachers' skills in the use of ICT when it is established in April.