

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 15 January 2002

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

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

Questions to the First Minister

The European Union's Laeken Declaration

Q9 Brian Hancock: How does the First Minister intend to respond to the European Union's Laeken declaration? (OAQ14880)

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): The Laeken declaration is a text that was agreed between member states of the European Union at the summit in December. I was consulted by the Foreign Secretary through the Joint Ministerial Committee on Europe ahead of the summit and that committee will continue to provide a channel for putting forward my views as the debate unfolds. The declaration outlines important issues that will be of great interest to the Assembly in the period between now and the inter-governmental conference of 2004.

Raising the Cultural Profile of Wales

Q10 David Lloyd: How does the First Minister intend to raise the cultural profile of Wales within the rest of Europe? (OAQ14877)

The First Minister: Raising the profile of Wales in Europe and the rest of the world remains a key priority for the Cabinet.

Recent opportunities for raising Wales's cultural profile in Europe include the visit of the French ambassador to the International Film Festival of Wales in Cardiff last month and our recent participation at official level at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation general conference in Paris on 30 October 2001.

A further major opportunity will occur when Wales will be this year's featured country at the interceltic music festival in Lorient, Brittany.

Regenerating Steel Communities

Q11 Peter Law: What cross-cutting plans does the First Minister have to regenerate steel communities? (OAQ14883)

The First Minister: The £66 million programme to regenerate steel communities includes the preparation of the regeneration framework for south-east Wales. The framework, which has been prepared in partnership with the local authorities, the Welsh Development Agency and others, identifies and prioritises transportation, land use, economic development and community regeneration initiatives in a comprehensive and cross-cutting manner.

Policy to Assist Rural Areas

Q12 Kirsty Williams: How will the First Minister co-ordinate policy across the Assembly in 2002 to assist rural areas to recover from the position of 2001? (OAQ14894)

The First Minister: I co-ordinate policy for the Welsh Assembly Government and Ministers lead on matters within their respective portfolios. Action to assist rural areas is set out in a number of documents, including the rural recovery plan.

The Minister for Rural Affairs will continue to work closely with the rural partnership for Wales in developing rural policies. Following agreement with the rural partnership, we have invited tenders for detailed research into the reasons why young people leave rural areas and the barriers to them returning if they wish. One of the outcomes of the work will be an action plan to tackle the issues identified.

Creating a More Open Government

Q13 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: What steps has the First Minister taken to develop consistent and accessible consultation procedures to create a more open government? (OAQ14893)

The First Minister: Consultation is central to our commitment to being the most open and responsive administration in the UK, one that engages communities of interest and the public in policy-making. We have already made innovative use of information technology, through 'Cymru Ar-lein—Online for a Better Wales' for example, and are developing new consultation tools and guidance to enable effective participation for all in government.

Policy to Reduce Job Losses in North Wales

Q14 Ieuan Wyn Jones: How is the First Minister co-ordinating policy in north Wales to reduce job losses in the area? (OAQ14891)

The First Minister: The Welsh Assembly Government and Team Wales partners, including local authorities, co-ordinate action when responding to major closure announcements. That arrangement was recently strengthened through the Welsh Development Agency and Education and Learning Wales signing a memorandum of understanding to ensure that they adopt a true partnership approach in supporting communities experiencing job losses.

Implications of the Euro for Wales

Q15 Alison Halford: What discussions has the First Minister had regarding the euro's implications for Wales? (OAQ14873) *Transferred for written answer.*

The First Minister: The implications of the euro have been debated widely since its introduction on 1 January, including last week in Plenary in the Assembly.