

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 2 May 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 Economic Development

Broadband Access

Q3 Alison Halford: Were the reported comments made by Welsh Development Agency officials at the recent Welsh Affairs Select Committee accurate when they stated that north Wales was being left behind in broadband access and was likely to suffer economic decline as a result? (OAQ17113) *Transferred for written answer.*

The Minister for Economic Development (Andrew Davies): I am aware that the Welsh Affairs Select Committee is currently examining the availability and affordability of telecommunications infrastructure in Wales. I am also aware that the WDA gave evidence to that Committee recently, covering a range of relevant issues. One of the key topics for discussion was the Analysys report and action plan, which sets out a range of costed actions that are expected to improve access to affordable telecommunications in Wales. I expect to make an announcement on that plan shortly. The main reason for the report being commissioned was to ensure that all areas of Wales are able to benefit from access to telecommunications infrastructure, both economically and socially.

Postal Services

Q4 Brian Hancock: Has the Minister discussed the continuation of quality postal services in all areas of Wales with the Secretary of State for Wales? (OAQ17117) *Transferred for written answer by the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities.*

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): I meet the Secretary of State for Wales regularly to discuss a wide range of issues.

‘A Winning Wales’

Q8 Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on ‘A Winning Wales’ following comments made at the recent Welsh Development Agency conference in Newport? (OAQ17197)

Andrew Davies: Professor Porter made a very valuable contribution to the Assembly Government’s thinking on ‘A Winning Wales’ at the WDA/University of Glamorgan future competitiveness conference on 3 April.

Provision of Broadband Technology

Q9 Janice Gregory: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of broadband technology to community centres in Wales? (OAQ17121)

Andrew Davies The Assembly Government is making £10 million available over three years to build local broadband networks to schools, libraries and community information and communications technology centres. These networks will link into the recently procured Welsh lifelong learning network. I shall be making an announcement with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in the next few weeks about the allocation and use of funding for local networks.

Employers' Contributions to National Insurance

Q10 Phil Williams: What effects will the increase in employers' contributions to national insurance have on businesses in Wales? (OAQ17198)

Andrew Davies: The Treasury estimates that the overall cost of employers' contributions in the UK next year will be £3.9 billion. No regional breakdown of this figure is available. However, since Wales's share of UK gross domestic product is around 4 per cent, the contribution of Welsh employers is likely to be approximately £150 million.

Cup Final at the Millennium Stadium

Q11 Nick Bourne: What assessment has been made of the economic benefits of keeping the cup final at the Millennium Stadium? (OAQ17157)

Andrew Davies: Cardiff County Council has undertaken an economic impact review of the Football Association Cup and other major football matches hosted by the Millennium Stadium in 2001. That was a condition of the support given by the Assembly Government to the council in that year. The council submitted a report to the Assembly Government last February, and that will be taken into account in any decisions on additional support for 2002.

I would welcome the FA Cup final making its permanent home in Wales, but it is the responsibility of the Football Association to determine the venue for the FA Cup final.

Attracting Inward Investment to Wales

Q12 Jonathan Morgan: What meetings has the Minister had with officials from the Welsh Development Agency with regard to attracting inward investment to Wales? (OAQ17107)

Andrew Davies: I am in regular contact with officials from the WDA about a wide variety of issues affecting the Welsh economy, including inward investment.

Targedau Cyflogaeth

C13 Gareth Jones: A wnaiff y Gweinidog ddatganiad ar dargedau cyflogaeth mewn ardaloedd Amcan 1? (OAQ17194) [W]

Andrew Davies: Un o brif amcanion dogfen raglennu sengl Amcan 1 yw creu tua 43,500 o swyddi ychwanegol i'r rhanbarth. Nid yw'r ffigur hwn wedi ei rannu o fewn y rhanbarth.

Employment Targets

Q13 Gareth Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on employment targets in Objective 1 areas? (OAQ17194) [W]

Andrew Davies: One of the key objectives of the Objective 1 single programming document is to create a total of around 43,500 additional jobs for the region. This figure is not broken down by different parts of the region.

Community Investment Tax Credits

Q14 Peter Black: What plans does the Minister have to increase the take-up of community investment tax credits? (OAQ17156)

Andrew Davies: The community investment tax credit is being cleared by the Treasury through the state aids procedure, and we are awaiting final details. We are in close touch with the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry on the matter, with a view to maximising the advantages for Wales when the full details of the scheme are settled.

Economic Prosperity of Barry

Q15 Owen John Thomas: What plans does the Minister have to secure the future economic prosperity of Barry? (OAQ17130)

Andrew Davies: The Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for achieving economic prosperity for Wales as a whole is set out in 'A Winning Wales'.

Specifically in Barry, the WDA has been working in partnership with the Vale of Glamorgan Council to promote the regeneration of the greater Barry area since the mid 1990s.

Questions to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

Gweithdrefnau Cyfrifyddol

C9 Cynog Dafis: Pa drefniadau y bydd y Gweinidog yn eu gwneud i sicrhau tryloywder yng ngweithdrefnau cyfrifyddol y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol? (OAQ17186) [W]

Edwina Hart: Mae'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol yn dilyn yr egwyddorion cyfrifo a nodir yn 'Government Accounting' a'r 'Resource Accounting Manual'. Bydd y cyfrifon blynyddol yn cael eu harchwilio gan Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru, a bydd ef yn llunio adroddiad. Mae'r Ysgrifennydd Parhaol yn ymddangos gerbron y Pwyllgor Archwilio bob blwyddyn i drafod canfyddiadau Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru.

Accounting Procedures

Q9 Cynog Dafis: What arrangements will the Minister be making to ensure transparency in National Assembly accounting procedures? (OAQ17186) [W]

Edwina Hart: The National Assembly follows the accounting principles laid out in 'Government Accounting' and the 'Resource Accounting Manual'. The annual accounts are audited by the Auditor General for Wales and he produces a report. The Permanent Secretary appears before the Audit Committee every year to discuss the Auditor General for Wales's findings.

Agreement of Private Finance Initiatives

Q10 Janet Ryder: What consideration is given to the projected total cost to the public purse before entering into a private finance initiative agreement? (OAQ17174)

Edwina Hart: The outline business case requires a demonstration of whole-life value for money savings through the use of a public sector comparator.

Assembly Strategies

Q11 Jocelyn Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on how effectively the Assembly budget is funding Assembly strategies? (OAQ17180)

Edwina Hart: As Minister with responsibility for finance, my aim is to achieve the best possible fit between policy, strategy and resources. We are currently reviewing our investment priorities and we will present proposals for consultation next month in relation to the 2002 budget round.

Theatres in North Wales

Q12 Alison Halford: Will the Minister consider separate and additional funding from the Assembly budget for the refurbishment of theatres in north Wales? (OAQ17170)

Edwina Hart: There are existing sources of funding already available for this purpose. The Arts Council of Wales provides lottery grants to assist in the redevelopment of theatres across Wales. For local authority managed theatres, it would be for them to determine the appropriate level of investment and how to secure the funding for it.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Q13 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on her discussions with the Secretary of State prior to the announcement of the Westminster Government's comprehensive spending review? (OAQ17128)

Edwina Hart: I have regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Wales about all financial matters relating to Wales, including those associated with the UK government spending review.

New Assembly Building

Q14 Christine Gwyther: Will the Minister please make a statement on the plans for the coming year relating to the recommencement of work on the new Assembly building? (OAQ17127)

Edwina Hart: I refer the Member to the answer given to WAQ17219, a copy of which is given below.

The new multi-discipline project management team with responsibility for delivering the project to cost, quality and time will be appointed shortly. An advert for this commission was placed in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* in December 2001, inviting expressions of interest. Invitations to tender were issued to the shortlisted companies on 1 March 2002 and interviews were held on 18 April 2002. One of its first tasks will be to assist in the appointment of the develop and construct contractor, which is due to be made by the end of the year.

Following the appointment of the project management team, regular progress reports on the project will be provided on the Assembly building website (www.wales.gov.uk/assemblybuilding).

Financing of the Wales Millennium Centre

Q15 Alison Halford: What changes will the Minister make to Assembly budgets to take account of papers given to the Culture Committee detailing the financing of the Wales Millennium Centre? (OAQ17123)

Edwina Hart: I will not make any changes to Assembly budgets. Total budgetary provision of up to £37 million for the Wales Millennium Centre has already been made following the Plenary debate on 22 January. However, the timing of payments is being reviewed in light of changes to the cash flow position

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now that the project is on site, and I am working closely with the Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language on this.