

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 23 October 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

Independent Care Sector

Q6 Pauline Jarman: Will the Minister make a statement on progress made in providing incentives to stimulate job creation in the independent care sector? (OAQ19554)

The Minister for Economic Development (Andrew Davies): Some 70,000 people are employed in social care in Wales; at least two thirds of these are employed in the independent sector and the numbers have been growing in recent years. The Welsh Assembly Government is fully aware of the significant contribution that the sector makes to the economy of Wales.

The chief inspector of social services in Wales has led a task and finish group on workforce issues in social care. The group has set out a strategy for improving recruitment and retention of the social care workforce and to raise quality standards. The strategy is being implemented.

Finance Wales

Q7 Delyth Evans: Can the Minister make a statement on the progress of Finance Wales? (OAQ19538)

Andrew Davies: Finance Wales continues to make good progress towards achieving its five-year targets of assisting 4,000 small firms with growth potential and creating 10,000 new jobs. Comparing the first six months of this financial year with the same period last year, activity has accelerated significantly. For example, the number of small firms assisted has increased by 75 per cent and the impact on jobs created has increased by 41 per cent. Where progress has not been as rapid as originally anticipated, Finance Wales is reviewing its programmes and preparing to make changes that will ensure that it fully captures the needs of the market.

Objective 1 Programme

Q8 Delyth Evans: Will the Minister make a statement on the Objective 1 programme for west Wales and the Valleys? (OAQ19537)

Andrew Davies: The Objective 1 programme for west Wales and the Valleys is making good progress, with over £380 million committed to 665 projects across the region. A quarterly report on the progress of the structural funds programmes will be made to the Economic Development Committee at its meeting next week.

Welsh Film Industry

Q9 Jonathan Morgan: What economic development assistance is available in order to promote and develop the Welsh film industry? (OAQ19530)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly Government makes a wide range of support available to promote and enable the development of the Welsh film industry directly and through its sponsored public bodies and other agencies. Sgrŷn is the principal body in this area, operating a number of grants itself, including £900,000 of lottery funding each year, as well as acting as a portal to other national and international opportunities.

There is also scope for the Welsh Development Agency, Finance Wales and the Wales Tourist Board to provide assistance from existing grant and loan programmes. Film businesses can also apply directly to the Assembly for assistance from regional selective assistance or Assembly investment grant.

Arwain Project

Q10 Alison Halford: Will the Minister outline the implications of the Arwain project for north Wales? (OAQ19539)

Andrew Davies: The aim of the Arwain project is to help people connect to a shared broadband internet connection in the Cardiff area. Arwain is a not-for-profit organisation with open membership, and actively seeks out opportunities to help others develop similar projects. It is a model that can be rolled out almost anywhere.

Broadband in North Wales

Q11 Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the measures that the Assembly is taking to promote the availability and take-up of broadband internet services in north Wales? (OAQ19542)

Andrew Davies: The Broadband Wales action plan is an all-Wales plan aimed at stimulating supply and demand. A range of actions have already been taken forward as part of the plan. These are:

- the satellite subsidy scheme is operational and three out of the four applications received from north Wales have been approved;
- ‘try before you buy’ broadband demonstration facilities are available at six locations across north Wales;
- Assembly Government spending approvals worth over £1 million have been issued to local authorities in north Wales to develop the lifelong learning network;
- the Assembly is in discussion with the North Wales Economic Forum about placing a Broadband Wales representative in north Wales to ensure that the action plan is driven forward in a way that addresses local needs. The forum will submit a proposed action plan for our consideration by the end of November;
- an information day detailing the aims, objectives and activities of the Broadband Wales action plan will be held on 5 November in Ewloe;
- the Assembly is financially supporting the e-fro project in Dyffryn Ogwen, which aims to demonstrate the benefits and bring affordable broadband to the area.

Finally, the additional £15 million for the Broadband Wales action plan, announced by the Finance Minister, will be used across Wales, including the north.

Question 12 (OAQ19532) is withdrawn.

Allied Steel and Wire

Q13 Dafydd Wigley: What discussions has the Minister had with staff at Allied Steel and Wire regarding the future of the plant and its workforce? (OAQ19557)

Andrew Davies: I attended a joint ASW union meeting at the Railway Club in Splott, on 5 September. During the meeting, we discussed workers' concerns about the pension scheme, Castle Nails' exclusion from the iron and steel employees readaption benefits scheme, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation's relationship with the receiver, and training, education and employment issues. A number of action points were identified and have all been acted upon.

Redeveloping Steel Communities

Q14 Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on what progress had been made in redeveloping the steel communities after the Corus closures? (OAQ19543)

Andrew Davies: The £76 million Corus package provided by the Welsh Assembly Government has been used to fund a number of diverse projects aimed at the long-term regeneration and sustainability of the former steel communities. For example, Education and Learning Wales has provided support and advice for some 2,000 redundant steelworkers, while the Welsh Development Agency has continued to support the development of information and communications technology infrastructure, including the roll-out of broadband to strategic areas. I am also pleased to report that the £2.9 million Valleys innovation technology and communication centre has been granted planning permission, which will fill the gap for high-quality technology and training in the Valleys.

Economi Conwy

C15 Gareth Jones: Pa gamau y mae'r Gweinidog yn eu cymryd i gryfhau economi Conwy? (OAQ19561) [W]

Andrew Davies: Mae strategaeth datblygu economaidd Llywodraeth y Cynulliad, 'Cymru'n Ennill', yn nodi sut yr ydym yn mynd i wella'r economi drwy Gymru benbaladr. Mae Llywodraeth y Cynulliad a'i phartneriaid yn Nhîm Cymru yn cydweithio er mwyn annog buddsoddiad a chynlluniau creu swyddi ym mhob rhan o Gymru, gan gynnwys Conwy. Yn gynharach eleni, cymeradwyais grant cymorth rhanbarthol dewisol sylweddol er mwyn galluogi cwmni newydd i fuddsoddi yn hen ffatri Alcoa yn Nolgarrog, ac er mwyn diogelu llawer o'r swyddi yno. Byddaf yn cymryd rhan mewn cyfarfod o Fforwm Economaidd Gogledd Cymru ar 22 Tachwedd, lle bydd gennyf gyfle i wrando ar unrhyw bryderon neu gynigion sydd gan aelodau'r fforwm, gan gynnwys Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy.

The Conwy Economy

Q15 Gareth Jones: What steps is the Minister taking to strengthen the economy of Conwy? (OAQ19561) [W]

Andrew Davies: The Assembly Government's economic development strategy, 'A Winning Wales', identifies how we are to improve the economy throughout Wales. The Assembly Government and its Team Wales partners are working together to encourage investment and job creation in all areas of Wales, including Conwy. Earlier this year I approved a substantial regional selective assistance grant to enable a new company to invest in the former Alcoa factory at Dolgarrog, and to safeguard many of the jobs there. I will participate in a meeting of the North Wales Economic Forum on 22 November, when I will have an opportunity to listen to any concerns and proposals of forum members, including Conwy County Borough Council.

Questions on Finance to the Finance Minister

Private Finance Initiative Projects

Q9 Janet Ryder: Will the Minister make a statement on how the Assembly's code of practice on access to information is exercised in relation to private finance initiative projects? (OAQ19574)

The Finance Minister (Edwina Hart): The Assembly's Code of Practice on Public Access to Information applies equally to all information held, including private finance initiative schemes.

Assembly Budget

Q10 Delyth Evans: Will the Minister make a statement on the Assembly's budget following July's comprehensive spending review? (OAQ19521)

Edwina Hart: I refer you to the official Record of Proceedings for a transcript of my statement to Plenary on the outcome of the spending review on 16 July, and my statement to Plenary on the draft budget on 15 October.

Draft Budget Proposals

Q11 Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the Assembly Government's draft budget proposals? (OAQ19525)

Edwina Hart: I refer you to the official Record of Proceedings for a transcript of my statement to Plenary on the draft budget on 15 October.

New Assembly Building and Chamber

Q12 David Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on the projected timetable for the new Assembly building? (OAQ19513)

Q13 Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on the latest stage of the new Assembly Chamber? (OAQ19526)

Edwina Hart: I refer you to my answer to Rhodri Glyn Thomas's question 4 (OAQ19576) in Plenary today.

Culture, Sport and Welsh Language Budget

Q14 Helen Mary Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on increases awarded to the culture, sport and Welsh language portfolio in the Assembly budget? (OAQ19579)

Edwina Hart: I refer you to the official Record of Proceedings for a transcript of my statement to Plenary on the draft budget last week. The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language will provide further details shortly.

Private Finance Initiative Schemes

Q15 Peter Black: What private finance initiative schemes are currently planned to be undertaken in Wales? (OAQ19528)

Edwina Hart: Information regarding private finance initiative schemes approved or supported by the Assembly are contained on the Assembly's internet site. Further detail is being collected in respect of projects within NHS Wales, which will be added upon receipt.