

Answers issued to Members on 15 May 2008

[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 Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What discussions has the Minister had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the impact of rising fuel prices on Welsh motorists, hauliers and businesses? (WAQ51693)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport (Ieuan Wyn Jones): None, although the matter is being kept under review.

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): When did the Minister last meet management at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, and what was the outcome? (WAQ51696)

The Deputy First Minister: The National Botanic Garden of Wales has recently appointed a new Chairman. I will meet with the new Chairman and the Director at the earliest convenient opportunity.

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What discussions has the Minister had with Pembrokeshire County Council regarding dualling of the A40 to Fishguard? (WAQ51704)

The Deputy First Minister: I met with members of Pembrokeshire County Council on 31 January 2008 and this issue was discussed.

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How many new business start ups have there been in the West Wales and the Valleys convergence funding region in each year since 1999? (WAQ51705)

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How many firms have gone out of business in the West Wales and the Valleys convergence funding region in each year since 1999? (WAQ51706)

The Deputy First Minister: The available official information is given in the table. Business start-ups and closures are estimated by data on the numbers of businesses that register and de-register for VAT in each calendar year, as produced by the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR).

The stock of VAT registered businesses in West Wales and the Valleys at the beginning of 2007 was 8 per cent higher than at the beginning of 1999. This increase can be accounted for by the fact that between 1999 and 2006, the number of businesses registering for VAT in West Wales and the Valleys increased by 11 per cent while the number de-registering fell by 12 per cent.

The estimates exclude the large number of businesses operating below the VAT threshold for turnover. Furthermore, some businesses will start-up but may not register for VAT until some time later, while some businesses de-registering may remain in business but with a turnover below the VAT threshold.

Table: Enterprises registering and de-registering for VAT, West Wales and the Valleys

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Registrations	3,540	3,600	3,490	3,730	4,315	4,195	3,925	3,915
De-registrations	3,575	3,400	3,130	3,410	3,715	3,330	3,115	3,140

Source: Enterprise Directorate, BERR

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister provide details of the number and overall cost of parking tickets issued in each local authority in Wales in each year since 1999? (WAQ51724)

The Deputy First Minister: The Department for Constitutional Affairs holds this information for England and Wales.

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): When did the Minister last meet organisers of the 2010 Ryder Cup, and what was the outcome? (WAQ51725)

The Deputy First Minister: I meet regularly with the organisers of the 2010 Ryder Cup and last formally met with them as part of the quarterly Ministerial Steering Group meeting held on 24 April 2008.

At the last meeting, we discussed the good progress being made on road and rail improvements, security planning for the event and infrastructure arrangements including the provision of Park and Ride facilities. We also discussed progress in the planning and preparation of events and business meetings for both the 2008 and 2010 Ryder Cup weeks.

Irene James (Islwyn): When does the Minister expect the feasibility study investigating the provision of direct trains between Ebbw Vale and Newport to be completed and will he make a statement on its progress? (WAQ51729)

The Deputy First Minister: The feasibility study results will be provided by Network Rail in the next 2/3 months.

Darren Millar (Clwyd West): Further to WAQ50563 what is the average passenger subsidy following the first year of operation and how much of the maximum subsidy has been paid out? (WAQ51730)

The Deputy First Minister: The first twelve months of operation from 8 May 2007 saw 14,133 passengers booked on the service. This represents a per passenger subsidy to the airline of £57 at average current levels. The maximum grant payable for 2007-2008 is capped at £808,000.

This covers the forecast deficit Highland Airways has incurred in running the service. The maximum subsidy for the first year of operation will be paid out subject to the fulfilment of the Public Service Obligation.

Darren Millar (Clwyd West): Further to WAQ50562 when will the Minister be in a position to provide this information? (WAQ51731)

The Deputy First Minister: My officials are currently carrying out an evaluation of the first twelve months of the service. This will give results of passenger surveys that included questions on usage by different categories of passengers. I expect the final report in the summer.

Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister provide details of the number of cases of bovine tuberculosis in Wales in each year since 1999? (WAQ51698)

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Elin Jones): The table below provides details of the total number of new TB herd incidents and the animals slaughtered for TB in Wales in each year in the period 1999 to 2007.

Year	New herd incidents (a)	Animals slaughtered (b)
1999	280	1,400
2000	260	1,400
2001	210	2,100
2002	620	5,100
2003	630	5,700
2004	660	5,500
2005	730	6,800
2006	770	6,100
2007	930	7,900

Source: DEFRA

(a) Herds in Wales, that were previously not under restriction, that had a TB reactor. Excludes holdings that are already under restriction.

(b) Total number of animals from Welsh Holdings slaughtered for TB. Includes reactors, inconclusive reactors and direct contacts. Includes animals from new and continuing incidents.

The number of bovine TB incidents depends on the number of tuberculin and gamma interferon tests carried out and on the nature of the testing regime at the time (as well as on the underlying prevalence of the disease). During the 2001 FMD outbreak, tuberculin testing was significantly reduced and necessarily targeted to higher risk herds e.g. those tested following routine inspection of animals at slaughterhouses. At any time, the more herds you test, the more likely you are to find bovine TB.

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): When did the Minister last speak to Post Office Ltd regarding the branch closure programme in Wales, and what was the outcome? (WAQ51710)

The Deputy Minister for Regeneration (Leighton Andrews): I last met formally with Post Office Ltd (POL) on 6 February. At this meeting POL provided me with an update on their ongoing closure programme in Wales. I have also had conversations subsequently with Huw Roberts, Director of Welsh Affairs, Royal Mail Group, the last of which was on 30 April.

Nicholas Bourne (Mid and West Wales): When did the Minister last speak to the UK Government regarding the closure of post offices in Wales, and what was the outcome? (WAQ51711)

Leighton Andrews: Post office closures were included on the agenda for the meeting on 15 October 2007 with Wales Office Ministers. At this meeting Ministers discussed the latest position on the closure programme affecting Wales. The Deputy First Minister, the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government and I met with Royal Mail Group and Post Office Ltd on 6 February 2008. Subsequent to this, the First Minister spoke to the Secretary of State for Wales and followed this up with a letter to him on 19 February.