

18 June 2003

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DP 354 | 03-07

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Dear Mr Cairns

RESPONSE TO ASSEMBLY QUESTIONS

I have been asked to respond to you directly on a number of Assembly Questions you tabled which relate to operational matters within the National Council – ELWa. Your questions and our responses are detailed below.

- Q Alun Cairns: Who were the recipients of funding paid by ELWa to or for the 'DERA Aberporth (QinetiQ)' project? (WAQ25913)**
- A** The National Council – ELWa funds QinetiQ and the MoD for Foundation Modern Apprenticeships and Modern Apprenticeships through its Work Based Learning Programmes (WBL). The beneficiaries of this programme are the young people who are enrolled on these programmes. We are also working, with QinetiQ and other partners, to develop the learning network to meet the needs of individuals businesses and communities arising from the development of ParcAberporth and the South Ceredigion Regeneration Action Plan. This project is still at the development stage and our only expenditure to date has been on a Feasibility and Planning Study.
- Q Alun Cairns: Was any of the £881,250 grant committed by ELWa to or for 'DERA Aberporth (QinetiQ)' project paid up front and if so, how much? (WAQ25914)**
- A** The National Council – ELWa does not make grant payments for WBL activities. The activity is funded on the basis of output related contracts. Thus no monies were paid up front. Payment for a Feasibility study was made after the study was satisfactorily completed.

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Q Alun Cairns: Would the Minister make a statement on 'DERA Aberporth (QinetiQ)' project that received funding support from ELWa? (WAQ25915)

A The National Council - ELWa has traditionally supported apprentice training at Aberporth. In order to meet changing customer needs and to reduce costs, the National Council - ELWa and QinetiQ have been working to move existing facilities and increase the scope of provision at ParcAberporth – a Technology Park being developed by the WDA, alongside West Wales airport. By placing training, literally, at the centre of business development, ELWa and the WDA are ensuring that the emerging needs of the knowledge-based businesses in mid Wales are being met. This is an important project – indeed it is an Objective 1 strategic site and is receiving additional support from the Welsh Assembly Government through the South Ceredigion Regeneration Action Plan.

Q Alun Cairns: Who were the recipients of funding paid by ELWa to or for the 'The Sustainable Experience' project? (WAQ25916)

A As already outlined to you by the Minister in her response to your question, the Centre for Alternative Technology were the recipients of funding paid by the National Council – ELWa for what was known internally as 'The Sustainable Experience' project.

Q Alun Cairns: Was any of the £967,000 grant committed by ELWa to or for the 'The Sustainable Experience' project paid up front and if so, how much? (WAQ25917)

A Initial discussion identified a need for £967,000 funding and thus the National Council - ELWa applied to the Assembly for the approval of this amount. Subsequent discussion with the provider with regard to deliverability within financial year deadlines and available budget within the National Council - ELWa led to a contract to a maximum value of £300,000 (inclusive of VAT) being placed. The contract between the provider and the National Council - ELWa was output based including both capital and learning outcomes and included detailed cost centres.

In relation to payment in advance of need, this project together with 17 other further investment projects has been the subject of an internal review with the findings being formally passed to the NAO. Should any issues be identified, the NAO will hold us to account in the proper manner. In the meantime, we cannot comment on whether payments in advance of need were made on this project or any other of the 17 further investment projects. Indeed, CAT is making good progress towards meeting the learning outcomes identified - these outcomes are phased and targets are contracted up to the end of 2005.

Q Alun Cairns: Would the Minister make a statement on the 'The Sustainable Experience' that received funding support from ELWa? (WAQ25918)

A This project has facilitated the enhancement and expansion of learning activities that deliver sustainable development principles. The project also supports Welsh Assembly Government policies regarding sustainability and addresses issues identified within the National Council – ELWa's Mid Wales Regional Statement of Needs and Priorities). The specific objectives of the project are;

- to enable other learning providers and groups to use the facilities to provide sustainable development skills to a wide spectrum of businesses, sectors, communities and individuals;
- to achieve improvement to existing educational facilities;
- to develop bi-lingual display / interactive facilities to meet the needs of all client groups;
- to ensure the facilities can be accessed and interacted with by disabled and or special needs individuals and groups; and
- to increase the capacity of the educational facilities to meet increasing demand.

Q Alun Cairns: Who were recipients of funding paid by ELWa to or for the 'Engineering Sector N Wales – FE Capital Expenditure'? (WAQ25919)

A The recipients of funding were Deeside College, Coleg Menai, Llandrillo College, Yale College, Welsh College of Horticulture, Coleg Llysfasi, and Coleg Meirion Dwyfor.

Q Alun Cairns: Was any of the £3,525,000 grant committed by ELWa to or for the 'Engineering Sector N Wales – FE Capital Expenditure' project paid up front and if so, how much? (WAQ25920)

A Internal audit reviews have been undertaken at our instigation on the Pop Factory project and the further 17 investment projects that were processed at the same time as the Pop Factory project. The findings have been formally reported to the National Audit Office who are considering these alongside their own review of these matters. The NAO review includes the issue of payment in advance of need.

Q Alun Cairns: Would the Minister make a statement on the 'Engineering Sector N Wales – FE Capital Expenditure', which received funding support from ELWa? (WAQ25921)

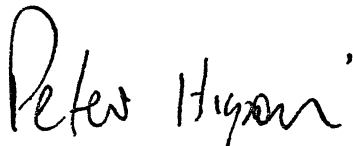
A In 2001, the North Wales Economic Forum identified a specific demand for high quality training opportunities in the region to meet the needs of the growing engineering and manufacturing sectors. The National Council developed an ambitious £3.525 million project to boost training opportunities by making funding

available to further education colleges to update their facilities and purchase cutting edge equipment that is appropriate for the transition from learning to employment.

Colleges from across North Wales entered bids for funding and were subject to a rigorous application process, overseen by an external panel of experts which included representatives from manufacturing and engineering firms, which resulted in seven colleges being successful. Boosting the quality of engineering training is regarded as vital for the region's economy in which at least five per cent of the whole workforce are engaged in jobs of this kind. These tend to be the higher earning, higher value jobs. At present there are 800 young people in North Wales undergoing apprenticeships for engineering careers, who are linked to local further education colleges and who will benefit from the fund.

If you have any further questions or would like a briefing on our activities, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Higson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Peter Higson
Interim Chief Executive