

Ken Skates will visit China to cement Welsh links

Ken Skates announced his impending visit to China at the North Wales Export Forum – one of two events being held to reinforce the Welsh Government's focus on exports and exporters as the UK prepares for life outside of the EU.

The Economy Secretary said:

"I am pleased to have attended both the South Wales and North Wales Export Forum and to have spoken directly to some of our most influential exporters as we prepare for life outside the EU.

"Increasing the value of exports and the number of exporters in Wales have been central pillars of our economic strategy for some time and at this time of change it is more important than ever that we focus on strengthening our trade relations with countries across the world.

"We already have a comprehensive range of support to help companies export and have been proactive in some of the world's largest markets for some time.

"And I am pleased to confirm that next month I will be joining 18 Welsh companies as part of their next trade mission to China with a view to expanding our trade relations and building on what is already a strong and thriving relationship.

"As part of my trip I will be visiting Chongqing and Shanghai and am optimistic that both my visit and the trade mission will enable Welsh companies to win new export business in China.

"This is borne out by experience as my visit and the trade mission to Japan last October has already resulted in £1.4m of orders and potential contracts for the businesses that travelled there.

"I think we all recognise there are challenging times ahead for businesses. I am determined to make sure that we do what we can to help businesses maintain and, indeed, grow their export business as the UK transitions out of the EU."

One of the companies attending the February trade mission to China and Hong Kong is Wrexham based, specialist manufacturer Conren. Their company export manager, Veronica Dawson said:

“Exporting is key to our business and we currently export to over 30 markets around the world. It has greatly benefitted our business, providing an essential source of revenue, and it has also encouraged us to be more innovative as we develop our products to meet challenges in the global marketplace.

“The Welsh Government has been key to our export success, providing support and advice as we look to new markets. The Export Forum provided a great opportunity for us to meet other exporters from across Wales and hear how other companies are preparing for the future, and we are very much looking forward to next month’s trade mission.”

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£83.7m International Convention Centre Wales will be game changer and major asset

NatWest’s local corporate team will provide a £51.5m loan facility to the joint venture company which will construct and manage the new convention centre as a 50/50 partnership between Welsh Government and Celtic Manor Resort.

Contracts have been signed by the Welsh Government and Celtic Manor Resort to establish a shareholders’ agreement and project management agreement to build and run ICC Wales.

Ken Skates said:

"This will be a major asset for Wales, enabling us to compete with any venue in the UK and indeed Europe to attract and host key events that make a huge contribution to the economy.

"The development will provide a very real long-term boost for the entire economy of South Wales. It will create direct and indirect jobs during the construction and operational phases, provide new business opportunities for a wide range of supply chain companies and deliver extensive knock on benefits for tourism throughout the region.

"A facility of this calibre, quality and size is absolutely essential if we are to compete effectively in what is a highly competitive international market. It will place Wales firmly at the forefront of business tourism destinations and I am delighted it is being delivered in partnership with the Welsh Government."

Celtic Manor Resort Chairman Sir Terry Matthews said:

"The Celtic Manor Resort has already established a reputation as the UK's No 1 Conference Hotel but this new centre will be a real game-changer. In the past, we've been forced to turn away hundreds of millions of pounds of business because we did not have the capacity to hold the largest conferences. Not any longer.

"This International Convention Centre will allow us to attract the biggest and most lucrative business events to Wales, as well as high-profile summits and party political conferences. ICC Wales will rival any convention facility in Europe and will act as a magnet for major events, bringing huge benefits to the Welsh economy."

ICC Wales, which is projected to open for business in June 2019, will be capable of accommodating up to 5,000 delegates with a total floor space exceeding 26,000 square metres. It will house a 1,500-seat auditorium and separate exhibition hall which, at 4,000 square metres, will provide the largest pillar-free ballroom in Europe, capable of hosting 2,400 people for a gala dinner.

Other facilities include five divisible meetings rooms that will create a further 12 flexible spaces meeting rooms, breakouts at all levels to outdoor networking spaces, state-of-the-art technology with fully integrated audio visual facilities and fully serviced client offices, green rooms and production facilities.

A 2,500 square metre plaza will welcome visitors to the new centre and provide additional networking and exhibition space. There will be HGV loading bays direct to both the auditorium and main hall, and 700 car parking spaces under the facility with direct access to ICC Wales arrival atrium.

Banking and debt facilities were structured and delivered locally by Stuart Allison, Relationship Director at NatWest and David Moxham, Director of the bank's Structured Finance team.

First Minister welcomes the Prime Minister to Cardiff for Brexit talks

During the meeting, First Minister Carwyn Jones will urge Prime Minister Theresa May to use the Welsh Government's EU White Paper as the starting point for forthcoming Brexit negotiations.

The White Paper, published last week by First Minister Carwyn Jones and leader of Plaid Cymru Leanne Wood, is a comprehensive, credible plan for the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

The White Paper is not just a shopping list of demands from Wales, but a pragmatic starting point for negotiations that can deliver for all parts of the United Kingdom.

The paper balances concerns over immigration with the economic reality that makes participation in the single market central to Wales' future prosperity.

In today's meeting, the First Minister will also call on the Prime Minister to uphold the promises made during the referendum campaign that Wales would not lose funding as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

First Minister, Carwyn Jones said:

"I look forward to welcoming Government representatives from across the UK to Cardiff today. Today's meeting is an important opportunity for open and frank discussions about the UK's future post-Brexit.

"While we know that the UK will leave the EU we don't yet know how that will happen or what form our relationship with the EU will look like beyond that point. To inform that discussion, last week I launched our Brexit White Paper. This is a Paper that will be supported by almost three quarters of Assembly Members, setting out a comprehensive, credible and evidence-based plan for Brexit negotiations; securing both full and unfettered access to the Single Market and greater domestic control of immigration.

"It is not simply a list of demands. While it protects Wales' interests, it was created as a sensible starting point for negotiations for the whole UK."

Companies from Northern Powerhouse in Wales to explore investment opportunities

The two day fact finding visit (31 January to 1 February) follows a series of meetings between the Welsh Government and Northern Powerhouse companies that are interested in developing facilitates in Wales and working with Wales based supply chain companies.

This first visit forms part of a strategic programme of events being developed by the Welsh Government over the next 24 months to build close business links with Northern Powerhouse companies and support cross border collaboration and co-operation, particularly between North Wales and the Northern Powerhouse.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“North Wales and North West England have strong historical ties and we need to build on these to develop closer economic links and work together for the benefit of both regions. The number of very large infrastructure projects that are in the pipeline for Wales have opened up significant inward investment opportunities in North and South Wales and I am pleased we are proactively engaging with businesses to explore and maximise these opportunities.”

Multi-million pound projects include the Wylfa Newydd project on Anglesey, the potential for the development of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) in Trawsfynydd within the Snowdonia Enterprise Zone and Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon.

This first visit has a key focus on the £1.3bn Swansea Tidal Lagoon project that was recently backed by a government-commissioned review by Charles Hendry. The companies visiting Swansea have expressed an interest in setting up a facility in Wales should this project get approval, with a number also interested in collaborating with Welsh supply chain companies.

Opportunities in the nuclear sector and other large infrastructure projects will also be highlighted as well as the business support offered by the WG and local authorities to assist with inward investment.

The companies will meet and network with representatives from Welsh Government, Tidal Lagoon Power, The Association of British Ports, Swansea Bay City Region, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Councils.

The two year programme being drawn up by the Welsh Government will include a mixture of hospitality events, round table discussions, sector focus events and one to one meetings. The aim is twofold – to get a better understanding of the business objectives of key companies and to highlight the opportunities for collaboration and inward investment into Wales across a variety of sectors.

It builds on the cross border North Wales Summit held last year to discuss maximising economic opportunities between the regions.