

Education Secretary launches the Summer Reading Challenge

Every year, thousands of families all over Wales are involved in the UK's biggest reading event for children in libraries, the Summer Reading Challenge, which aims to get children between the ages of 4 and 11 to read six books or more from their library during the summer holidays. In Wales the challenge has a distinct Welsh focus and includes Welsh medium books.

Taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge is free and is one example of what public libraries offer to help children develop a love of reading, gain confidence and learn new skills.

The theme of this year's challenge is 'Mischief Makers' or 'Dyfeiswyr Direidi' and Dennis the Menace and his friends are encouraging children to get involved. By reading six library books over the summer holidays, children will get rewards and stickers to collect, with clues from Dennis to help readers complete the challenge and find the treasure chest of tricks.

Young people aged 12-24 can also take part through the Welsh Books Council's 'Reading Hack' initiative which sees them volunteer in libraries to support the Summer Reading Challenge.

Kirsty Williams said:

"The Summer Reading Challenge has proved hugely successful in motivating children to read more over the summer holidays.

"Reading is such a rewarding pastime for children and is fundamental to their development. Not only does it improve literacy skills, but it boosts their knowledge and most importantly fuels their imagination. If, as often happens, this glorious sunshine turns to rain as soon as the holidays start, what better way to keep the kids occupied when they can't get out and about!"

"Research has also shown that this helps keep their reading level up before going back to school in September. I would encourage parents to make the most of the time with their children this summer, dive into a book and who knows where you'll end up!"

For more information on the Summer Reading Challenge including how to get involved, and resources for schools, go to:

<https://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk/>

New chapter for Llechwen Hall as owners embark on major extension and refurbishment plan

Llechwen Hall's origins were as a 17th Century long house and the owners of the hotel are embarking on a project to expand the bedroom capacity and upgrade the hotel to a 4 Star quality.

The redevelopment of the popular weddings venue will include a spa and leisure facility, and allow the business to attract more corporate customers and higher spending leisure guests.

The investment for Llechwen Hall is from the Micro & Small Business Fund, supported through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and Welsh Government

This project will further improve the performance and strengthen the tourism offer within the region.

Ramish Gor, Financial Director for Llechwen Hall, said:

“We are proud and excited to be working on such a fantastic opportunity to further develop Llechwen Hall, making it a high-end, unique, destination hotel in the South Wales valleys. We look forward to welcoming both our local community and tourists from afar to come and experience a hospitality that complements the beautiful country that we love to call home. We'd like to thank Visit Wales and the Welsh Government for their huge support and for turning our vision into a reality.”

The Valleys Taskforce has also recently published a first-year progress report, detailing the breadth of the work over the last 12 months. One of the key priorities for the valleys taskforce is improving the tourism accommodation stock within the area.

The Tourism Minister, said:

“Investing in top end hotel experiences, with an emphasis on creating 4 Star quality is a priority for the Tourism sector. As the region develops its own tourism related solutions to regeneration, such as Bike Park Wales, there is a parallel opportunity to create a gear change within the quality of hotel accommodation, and help convert day visits to overnight stays.

It's excellent news that the owners are investing in Llechwen Hall – and I wish them every success with the venture.”

The development will support an additional 31 Full Time Equivalent jobs and of the current 19 FTEs, 13 are young people thereby supporting opportunities for young local people in the area to take up full time jobs and develop a career in tourism.

“The rights of EU citizens in Wales must be protected” – Finance Secretary tells Senator Cadic

Senator Cadic, who is a member of the French Senate’s Brexit Group, will meet members of the French community living in and around Cardiff to hear their experiences following the UK’s decision to leave the EU.

He and the Finance Secretary will discuss the rights of French citizens currently living or moving to Wales. Senator Cadic will also learn more about Wales’ plans post-Brexit.

Nicholas Hatton, co-chair and founder of the3million will join the meeting to talk about the support for EU citizens in Wales.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Professor Drakeford said:

“EU citizens living in Wales make an enormous contribution to our economy and society and their rights must be fully protected after the UK leaves the EU.

“Although immigration policy is reserved, the Welsh Government will work with the UK government to ensure EU citizens living in Wales are provided with certainty over their future rights and entitlements.

“Wales is an outward-facing nation – we are leaving the EU but we do not intend to leave Europe. We want to keep working together, learning from each other, travelling and trading together.”

First Minister calls for flexibility

from EU27 to avoid 'catastrophic no deal'

In his second meeting with the European Chief Negotiator, the First Minister will reiterate that while the Welsh Government supports continued participation in the Single Market and customs union, the UK government's white paper should open the door for the start of serious negotiations.

The First Minister will also meet Sir Tim Barrow in Brussels, the UK Permanent Representative to the EU, and deliver a keynote speech at the European Policy Centre. During his address, the First Minister will restate the Welsh Government's Brexit priorities, consider the UK government's negotiating position and reflect on how the UK and the EU 27 can work together to secure a mutually beneficial Brexit deal.

Speaking ahead of the meeting, the First Minister said:

"While the Prime Minister refuses to admit that her ill-judged red lines are a thing of the past, she has – at long last – set out a vaguely credible negotiating position.

"The UKG White Paper advocates partial participation in the Single Market and continued participation in a Customs Union by any other name. There are many flaws in the proposals and far too many questions remain unanswered. However, I believe it is a basis on which more serious negotiations can now start.

"I urge the EU27 to show an element of flexibility to avoid the catastrophic 'no deal' scenario. The need for such co-operation is brought into sharp focus by the US administration's protectionist attacks on the UK and EU steel industry. A clear demonstration that the UK and the EU share core values and core interests.

"By stepping over the redlines and working together I believe we can reach an agreement that provides the basis for a long-term economic relationship."

First Minister sets out legislative priorities

The Welsh Government will introduce new legislation to end the physical

punishment of children in Wales. The bill will be part of a package of measures to ensure children have the best start in life and provide support to parents.

A bill will also be brought forward to establish duties of quality and candour in health and social care. This will place statutory obligations on all health organisations in Wales to be open and transparent and will ensure lessons are learned and improvements made where necessary. A new independent body will be created to give people a stronger voice for their experiences of health and social care services.

The government will bring forward a local government bill, which will include reform of local authority electoral arrangements, including reducing the voting age to include 16 and 17-year-olds.

The way animals are treated is an important reflection of society and over the next 12 months, a bill will be introduced to ban the use of wild animals in travelling circuses on welfare grounds.

The government will also introduce a bill to make Welsh law more accessible. The Legislation (Wales) Bill will be the first major step towards achieving a clear and well-organised statute book.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“The year ahead will be one of the busiest for us in legislative terms since Wales gained primary law-making powers.

“Making our statute book ready for EU exit is a big challenge for the Welsh Government and the National Assembly but we must not let this limit our ambitions. We will keep driving forward progress and delivering for the people of Wales.”

In addition to the Welsh Government’s legislative programme, the National Assembly will be asked to undertake a substantial programme of correcting regulations under the EU (Withdrawal) Act between October and March in preparation for EU exit.