

Welsh Government make £2m available for West Wales Arfor pilot

The Arfor Innovation fund, a product of the Welsh Government's budget agreement with Plaid Cymru, will target support in Gwynedd, Anglesey, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, particularly in areas where there is a high percentage of Welsh speakers and an inflow of older people and outflow of younger people. It will focus on those areas where the foundational and agricultural economy are of vital importance and in market and university towns where low incomes remain an issue.

The funding being made available to the four local authorities will look to facilitate new and innovative methods to supporting economic development in the region, by:

- promoting enterprise and supporting business growth in areas with a high proportion of Welsh speakers
- generating more and better paid jobs to retain local people in these areas and encourage those who have left to return
- promoting the wide ranging value of the use of Welsh and bilingualism in business creating a vibrant sense of place
- encouraging the businesses and people who move to rural areas to value and use the Welsh language

In addition to supporting a range of projects within each local authority area, the nature of the scheme will allow for a collaborative approach to projects where the benefits can be felt across council boundaries. An evaluation of the programme will be commissioned to capture the success or otherwise of individual interventions and best practice from the programme of works.

In announcing this new programme today, Economy Minister Ken Skates said:

"This innovative programme, based on extensive discussion with local authority partners, aims to test out new approaches to promote entrepreneurship, business growth and community resilience in the four local authority areas, with a focus on promoting the use of the Welsh language.

The Economic Action Plan has been very clear on the need for Welsh Government to support all parts of our economy to drive up skills, encourage innovation and identify and utilise emerging technology. I am therefore pleased to provide £2 million funding over a two year period to support this initiative which will help guide and inform future activity in areas where we know the rural and foundational economies are of paramount importance, our Welsh speaking and rural heartlands."

Gwynedd County Council will co-ordinate the programme on behalf of the four local authorities to minimise costs. Speaking on behalf of the Arfor partnership, Gwynedd Council Leader Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn said:

“Today’s announcement is a significant step forward in our joint efforts to build a prosperous and sustainable future for the people and communities of Anglesey, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Gwynedd and a vibrant future for the Welsh language across the region.

This initial investment is the culmination of several months of joint-working between the Leaders of the four Arfor councils and the Welsh Government. With the funding now in place, we can move forward together to explore ways in which we can ensure a vibrant and diverse economy that includes new and better paid work for local people which will, in turn, support the Welsh language.

We very much hope that this will be the first phase of a project that will both boost the Arfor economy and contribute towards the government’s target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.”

Minister for International Relations and Welsh language visits the US to boost trade with Wales’ most important business partner

The United States is Wales’ largest inward investor, with some 270 US-owned companies currently based in Wales employing almost 50,000 people. America is also one of Wales’ top trading partners, importing £2.3 billion worth of goods from Wales last year.

During the 4 day visit, the Minister will hold meetings with US companies who have a presence in Wales or are considering expanding to Wales. The minister will also meet with senior political representatives in Washington, New York and Philadelphia as part of our commitment to strengthen relations between the 2 countries.

The meetings are designed to identify and promote export opportunities for Welsh businesses and meet with senior business reps who are considering investing in Wales – either new FDI or expansion plans – particularly important post-Brexit.

During the visit, the minister will address an audience at the World Bank in Washington on the 2030 Development Agenda and talk about Wales' ambitious and far-reaching Future Generations Act. This is the first time a Welsh Government Minister has visited the World Bank in Washington DC. The minister will then host a St David's Day reception on Capitol Hill for key political figures and business leaders.

2019 is the UNESCO year of Indigenous Languages, and on Thursday the minister will be speaking at the United Nations in New York on the unique approach taking in Wales to promote and encourage use of the Welsh language, including through our new school curriculum which proposes to teach Welsh as a first language to all learners. The minister will point out that Welsh is still very much a living language in a society dominated by a global language, which in itself is testament to the remarkable story of the survival of the language against all the odds, at a time when other Celtic languages have declined.

The minister will celebrate St David's day at a joint event with the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in New York in honour of Catherine Zeta Jones.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Eluned Morgan, said:

"This will be my first international visit in my new role and forms part of our continued efforts to promote Wales, and its many benefits, to the world. We have always been an outward looking nation. We recognise that we have a great deal to gain by working with others. Our international links enrich our country economically, socially and culturally, but we also have much to offer the world too.

"In the current international climate it is more important than ever to maintain close links with one of our most important markets. We are demonstrating that Brexit does not mean we are turning our backs on Europe and the world. The US is the 3rd largest export market for companies in Wales and now more than ever we need to make sure we are doing all we can to maintain these strong links and explore new possibilities for the future.

"Wales has so much to offer the world, from our rich culture and heritage, to our outstanding landscapes. We also have a unique story to tell in the way we are placing sustainability at the heart of all that we do. I believe Wales can provide the blueprint for others to follow in emphasising and protecting our culture and communities, and the environment. We are tackling the challenges of today, while also laying the foundations for a sustainable future. This is something we are fiercely proud of and something I believe we can all learn from."

First Minister marks start of a week of St David's Day events around the world

The First Minister, Mark Drakeford, will be in Brussels on Tuesday (26th February) to host a St David's Day reception and in Paris on Wednesday (27th February) to open officially the Welsh Government's new office in the city.

The Paris office is the latest in the Welsh Government's careful expansion of its presence in Europe and across the globe. Having representatives of Welsh Government in these areas significantly helps to promote Wales in order to sell Welsh goods to overseas markets, promote our tourism and higher education offers. They will also continue to help in our efforts to attract new inward investment into Wales which is increasingly challenging in the continuing climate of uncertainty surrounding Brexit.

The visits demonstrate Wales' commitment to maintaining relations with Europe, with the First Minister reiterating that whatever the outcome of the Brexit negotiations, Wales will continue to develop longstanding friendships with countries and regions in Europe.

Speaking ahead of his visit, the First Minister said:

"Our relationship with our closest neighbours in the EU remains especially important to us. Wales is a European nation and always will be.

"Around 60% of our manufactured exports go to the EU. We need to do all we can to sustain that business and preserve jobs. We now have offices in 5 European cities, which put us in a stronger position to strengthen our links with Europe during this crucial junction in our political and social history."

The Minister for International Relations and Welsh Language, Eluned Morgan, will be in North America this week in a bid to boost trade and raise Wales' profile.

The visit includes a St David's Day reception on Capitol Hill, as well as meetings with current and potential investors in Wales and an address to the World Bank in Washington DC.

The Welsh Government will also be using St David's Day to promote Wales right across the world, with events planned in Dubai, China, Japan and Canada to name a few.

Much closer to home, commuters in London will be greeted by a Welsh choir and have the opportunity to sample Welsh food and drink at Paddington Station this week. Welsh food will also be a feature at Borough Market and at Manchester Piccadilly on St David's Day.

The First Minister added:

"It's great to see the events taking place in the UK and beyond to celebrate St David's Day and promote Wales across the globe.

"It's important we make the most of the opportunity St David's Day presents to tell Wales' story to the world – we are a progressive, open and welcoming country, a nation alive with creativity and innovation, and supportive of businesses and people. As a country we have so much to offer and we will continue to work hard to sustain and develop that reputation in Europe and beyond."

Cymraeg for Kids

Since the programme was established in April 2016, tens of thousands of families have received support to use more Welsh.

Building on the progress Cymraeg for Kids has made over the past three years, a new contract has been awarded to Mudiad Meithrin so they can continue to provide this support and advice.

Minister for International Relations and Welsh Language, Eluned Morgan AM said:

"I am very pleased to announce the continuation of the Cymraeg for Kids programme. Cymraeg 2050 emphasises the importance of increasing Welsh language transmission rates within the family as well as ensuring a significant increase in the number of children in Welsh-medium education. Cymraeg for Kids has a vital role play in realising these two elements and I am pleased to announce that we will continue to work with Mudiad Meithrin to provide practical support for families across Wales."

Dr Gwenllïan Lansdown Davies, Mudiad Meithrin Chief Executive added:

"Supporting parents, carers and families to transfer or present Welsh to their children is key to the work that will lead to a million Welsh speakers by 2050. It is a privilege for Mudiad

Meithrin to be able to continue to deliver an exciting program like Cymraeg for Kids with its appealing activities available free of charge across Wales.”

Dinah Ellis, National Manager, Cymraeg for Kids added:

“Cymraeg for Kids has gone from strength to strength over the past three years and we are delighted to receive confirmation of its continuation. The team of officers across Wales look forward to continuing to offer free sessions, share information with families about Welsh-medium childcare and education as well as offering practical ideas on how to introduce Welsh in the home.”

No deal disruption at Port can easily be avoided – Jeremy Miles

Welsh ports are the gateway between Ireland and the rest of Europe, with 80% of goods carried in Irish-registered HGVs between the Republic of Ireland and Europe passing through Welsh ports.

Holyhead is a key entry point – its status as the second busiest roll-on roll-off ferry port in the UK means it provides a vital link in a seamless supply chain for businesses across Wales, the UK and Ireland.

Earlier this year the head of Stena Line, the company which runs the Port of Holyhead, said he fears significant disruption in the event of a no deal Brexit and claimed it was impossible to plan for such an event.

The Counsel General yesterday visited Holyhead where he met the Port’s manager, Captain Wyn Parry, who set out some of his concerns about operations in Holyhead if the UK crashes out of the EU without a deal in just 35 days.

Jeremy Miles said:

“I’ve said it before, but it feels like it needs repeating – there is no way of fully mitigating the effects of a no deal Brexit.

“Our priority is to ensure we are doing everything within our power to minimise the effect on Welsh communities and businesses.

“Ports in Wales make a critical contribution to our economy, not least by providing jobs and added value to local communities. Any risk to their operation poses a substantial risk to Wales as a

whole. Our ferry ports are particularly vulnerable to the shocks that could arise following a no deal Brexit.

“Most of the risks relate to border arrangements – to customs and safety checks. These are for the UK government to resolve. But the requirement by the EU for member states, including Ireland, to treat goods from the UK as a third country – with all the additional checks that involves – could cause knock-on delays at Welsh ferry ports, especially Holyhead.

“I am grateful to Captain Wyn Parry and his team for showing me around the port and explaining to me some of their concerns were we to face a no deal Brexit.

“It’s clear Holyhead would find it difficult to absorb the effects of any delays caused by additional checks. We are working on solutions to manage traffic disruption from delays at the port and potential sites on Anglesey have been identified and assessed to deal with any overflow on the road network, should delayed traffic not be contained within the confines of the port.

“All this could be avoided if the Prime Minister listened to and acted on our calls and removes no deal as an option.

“We’ve long advocated a different approach to Brexit – one built around consensus. This was set out in our White Paper, Securing Wales’ Future, which was agreed jointly with Plaid Cymru 2 years ago. This recognises there are trade-offs, and that involves participation in a customs union and the Single Market. The UK government must now swallow its pride, drop its red lines and provide the certainty the country needs.”