

Working parents in areas of Gwynedd and Anglesey urged to take up free childcare offer

The Minister visited the Ty Cegin Community Centre in Maesgeirchen, Bangor earlier today, where he met staff working on the Welsh Government's childcare offer, as well as Children First, Flying Start and Families First – all of which support and meet the needs of children and their families in the local area.

The Welsh Government's childcare offer provides working parents of 3 and 4 years old children with 30 hours of free early education and childcare for 48 weeks of the year.

In September 2017, the Welsh Government began piloting the offer in areas across Wales, including in areas of Anglesey and Gwynedd, ready for full roll-out across Wales by September 2020.

Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Providing free childcare is one of the Welsh Government's top commitments to the people of Wales.

“We are now in the process of rolling out our ground-breaking and ambitious childcare offer to areas across Wales – and I'm really pleased areas across Gwynedd and Anglesey are among the first to benefit.

“Working parents across Wales are already telling us it's making a real difference to their lives, reducing the strain on family income and helping ensure childcare is not a barrier to them taking up employment or increasing their hours.

“So I want to encourage more parents across Gwynedd and Anglesey to take up the offer. I also want to thank childcare providers for their enthusiasm and commitment to helping us deliver our ambitious offer.”

A celebration of Wales at Cardiff

Castle

The castle will host a celebration of Welsh culture, sport and heritage – from harpists and choirs to inspirational youngsters, award winning produce and cutting edge performers – providing the Royal couple with a snap shot of modern Wales.

The Culture, Tourism and Sport Minister will be part of the welcoming party, and was keen to give an insight into what the royal couple can expect:

Lord-Elis Thomas said:

“I’m delighted that Prince Harry and Meghan Markle have chosen to come to Wales as one of their first official visits since their recent engagement.

“We are very fortunate in Wales to have both a thriving cultural tradition and a vibrant, diverse offering. This is something we are all too keen to showcase, share and celebrate with rest the world and to do so in such prestigious company is a real privilege.

“The Welsh croeso is legendary, but our standing as a top class visitor destination, food producer, adventure hot spot, major events host and a lot more besides is also very much on the rise. I hope to see this visit provide a taste of the variety and quality of what’s on offer here in Wales.

“Indeed, our royal Welsh welcome extends well beyond this visit and we’d be only too pleased to highlight the magnificence of other parts of Wales in future.”

£5m EU funding boost for Bangor University

The funding will help create the Centre for Environmental Biotechnology, which will position the University at the cutting edge of research into how natural materials can be utilised within industrial products and processes.

The investment will enable Bangor University to work on major research and development projects with global businesses in sectors including life sciences, pharmaceutical, energy and manufacturing.

The facility will provide state-of-the-art equipment and world-leading

expertise for identifying and isolating enzymes in extremophiles. These are microorganisms that thrive in extreme conditions such as high temperature, salinity, or acidity. The enzymes can then be used to transform industrial processes in key sectors of the economy.

Speaking at an event in North Wales on Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

“Supporting initiatives that further pioneering scientific research is a key aim of the Welsh Government. This investment will create a centre of excellence for ground-breaking research, encouraging inward investment and ensure Wales can take advantage of the economic impact that this rapidly expanding industrial area could bring.

“This is one of many examples of how EU funds are supporting our nation’s economy, supporting growth and jobs, and demonstrates the importance of Wales receiving replacement funding from the UK Government after we leave the EU.”

The Centre for Environmental Biotechnology will also include investment from Bangor University. It will be located on the Deiniol Road site and will form the first part of a planned major redevelopment of the University’s science and engineering area.

Co-leader Professor Peter Golyshin said:

“These enzymes have wide application in many industrial processes such as in the pharmaceutical industry. The project will utilise state-of-the-art analytical equipment which will put North Wales at the forefront of developments in this exciting area of biotechnology.”

Refurbishment work to develop the centre will begin mid February.

[Minister praises Newport radio station for Energize’ing people’s lives](#)

Energize Media Community Interest Company (CIC) was established in January 2015 as a social enterprise and is based at the Shaftesbury Community Centre in Newport.

A small group of volunteers came together in 2014 with the aim of offering community radio to a group of vulnerable adults, along with young people and those with other disabilities.

The project took off and established itself when Jeremy and Nigel – two adults with moderate learning disabilities – used their Direct Payments and with the support of the volunteers, pooled them together and gave the project the boost it would need to keep growing.

As a result of the project, one of the founders, Jeremy Kempton, after 50 years of living with his mother has now moved into supported living, having increased his self confidence. His mother believes “the project and work done has given him a new life.”

As a group, they have also established a hugely successful school project which has worked with a number of pupils both in the Centre and in the nearby Newport High School. The integration of everyone in the project and the success with turning the lives round of the young people has seen praise come from across South Wales.

One of the founders, volunteer Simon Harvey said:

“What has been achieved by everyone involved with Energize is unbelievable, with Jeremy and Nigel putting faith in the project and pooling their Direct Payments allowed the door to open to so many more people. Many vulnerable adults and their families have feared using Direct Payments and are not aware of the freedoms they can offer.

“We are now working with the Wales Co-operative Centre to strengthen and expand our work, while fully supporting their vision for more Community Enterprises to take the lead in Social Care provision in Wales.”

Minister for Children & Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“I was really pleased to visit the centre today to meet everyone involved, but it was a real pleasure to hear of the inspirational way in which Jeremy and Nigel came together to help establish it, and the wonderful way it has changed their own lives, and those of so many others, for the better.

“It’s a great example of a successful social value organisation supporting people with learning disabilities and young people to develop skills, in keeping with the principles of our innovative Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

“This project has clearly made a real difference to many people’s

lives. I wish them every success in the future and hope the Project continues to grow from strength to strength.”

Opportunity opens for farmers to access grant to improve the performance of their holdings

The Farm Business Grant (FBG) helps farmers make their businesses more efficient, resilient and environmentally friendly by providing a contribution towards capital investments in items of equipment and machinery.

The third application window for the FBG opens on 29 January and will remain open until midnight on 16th March. It builds on the success of the first two windows which has seen over 850 applications, requesting a total of £5.7m of grant support.

Administration of the FBG will be transferred to Rural Payments Wales (RPW) for the third and subsequent windows. Applications and claims for the FBG will now be submitted through RPW Online.

The third window introduces new flexibility to the grant, allowing farmers to submit more than one application in a scheme year within the £3,000 to £12,000 grant limit. There are also minor changes to some of the eligible items – an updated full list of items is available on the [Farm Business Grant](#) page on the Welsh Government’s website.

Farmers will still be required to attend one of the Farming for the Future events, which will be held across Wales between 17 January and 1 February. Farmers who have already attended one of these events will not be required to attend again, unless they wish to do so.

The FBG is an important element of the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, and is a key commitment in the Programme for Government: Taking Wales Forward.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“Our farm Business Grant provides vital funding to help farmers invest in their business and improve the economic and environmental performance of their holdings. This funding is more important than ever as we prepare for an uncertain future as we leave the EU.

“We have been able to make some changes to the third window, to improve and provide flexibility to how the grant will work, by

listening to feedback about the grant. I encourage farmers across Wales to attend a 'Farming for the Future' roadshow and find out more information on the wide range of advice and support available to them."

For information on dates and locations for the roadshows and to reserve a place, visit [Farming Connect](#) or call the Farming Connect Service Centre on 08456 000 813.