

Aldi's new Welsh regional Distribution Centre opens having created 422 new jobs – with a further 400 jobs in the pipeline across South Wales

The news was warmly welcomed by Economy Secretary Ken Skates when he launched the company's new 40,000 sq. mt. distribution centre and regional offices on the Capital Business Park in Wentloog.

This major development, which will serve as a hub for Aldi's growing portfolio of stores across South Wales and the South West of England, was supported with £4.5m business finance from the Welsh Government.

Speaking at the opening Ken Skates said the Welsh Government is continuing to support Aldi's expansion plans across South Wales targeting Cardiff, Swansea and west Wales which will create a significant number of additional jobs and career opportunities over the next four years.

Ken Skates described the retail sector as one of the most important sectors for Wales, both in numbers of businesses and the number of people working in the sector and the range of job opportunities they provided.

He said:

"Retail is one of those sectors where both youth and experience are equally valued and each can find its place in either sustaining or driving the business forward.

"Supermarkets, along with their various operational support structures, provide different opportunities – from that first Saturday job for young people to fully fledged careers for those seeking supervisory and management roles.

"For many young people it is almost a rite of passage into the world of work and in many cases entire families can be employed by the same business.

"I also know that Aldi offers career paths for graduates and given its wider global reach, the opportunity to gain vital international experience of working in some of the world's largest market places which is very welcome."

He said the opening of the centre was a mark of confidence in the Welsh economy that has already created hundreds of jobs as well as opportunities for Welsh food producers.

Dan Oakenfull, Managing Director of the Cardiff Regional Distribution Centre, said:

“South Wales and the South West of England continue to be areas of significant growth for us, and the new distribution centre will help support our immediate and future expansion across the regions.

“The centre has created over 420 jobs for people living in Cardiff and the surrounding areas.”

The Welsh Government has run a number of Meet the Buyer events with Aldi and will continue to discuss further opportunities for Welsh suppliers. Last month Aldi announced it has introduced five new Welsh lamb products to its stores in North Wales. It follows a similar initiative in South Wales last year and means that all of Aldi's 38 stores in Wales will now stock an extensive range of fresh Welsh lamb products all year round.

Welsh Government support ensured the new centre was based in Wales as alternative sites in England were under consideration.

Funding was towards the abnormal land development costs of more than £5m to get the site ready for construction. Unforeseen ground conditions and hydrological and ecological restraint meant the construction of the new centre would not have been viable without funding support.

Sharp announces £9.5m expansion that will double staff numbers creating more than 70 jobs with Welsh Government support

Sharp Clinical Services (UK) Ltd, which provides global clinical trial services, is relocating from its current facilities in Crickhowell which are at full capacity and investing in the upgrading and fit-out of much larger premises in Rhymney.

The investment is backed by £500,000 business finance from the Welsh Government which ensured the expansion went ahead in Wales as another location in the Midlands was under consideration.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

"This is a significant expansion project for the life sciences sector in Wales and will effectively embed a large international healthcare plc in Wales, boosting our growing reputation as a key location for pharma service companies.

"I am delighted Welsh Government support helped secure this major investment for Wales that will create a range of skilled employment opportunities for local people and also bring a disused industrial building back into economic use."

Sharp UK's base in Crickhowell is the European hub of the Group's clinical services division and provides global clinical trial services including supplies, drug formulation, manufacturing, packaging, distribution and commercial packaging.

It is currently located in two separate buildings on Elvicta Business Park providing 45,000 sq. ft. of accommodation which is at full capacity with no room to expand and take on new business.

The expansion will enable the company to compete for major clinical and commercial packaging contracts with large pharmaceutical companies. The initial phase of the project will involve the acquisition and renovation of a 75,000 sq ft facility – part of a 108,000 sq ft space within a ten acre site providing space for future expansion and potentially further jobs.

Wales' Skills and Science Minister, Julie James said:

"Over the last few years the Welsh Government has invested millions in supporting Life Sciences in Wales and as one of our key priority sectors we are keen to see this important area grow even more.

"In Wales, the sector currently employs around 11,000 people in over 360 companies and its worth circa £2bn to the Welsh economy and we are committed to enhancing this further and building Wales' STEM skills capabilities and capacity.

"This expansion is welcome news for the sector, the local community and the wider Welsh economy and shows how Wales' healthcare and biotech industries are going from strength to strength."

Frank Lis, President of Sharp Clinical Services, said about the development,

"We have always felt that a critical part of the services we offer is the expertise of our teams. This new facility will allow us to grow both the Sharp team in Wales to support current business and to expand our clinical services portfolio to new customers, at a larger scale".

Sharp Clinical Services (UK) Ltd is part of the Sharp Packaging Services division of UDG Healthcare plc, a leading international provider of clinical, commercial, communications and packaging services to the health care industry. It employs more than 7000 people at operations across 23 countries and delivers services to more than 50 countries.

Financial incentives to attract graduates into teaching announced – Kirsty Williams

The latest figures show there has been a 3.9% increase in postgrad teacher training applications and a 2% increase in acceptances in Wales, with 3,500 in total for teacher training places in 2016/17.

Every year the Welsh Government invests in the teacher training incentive scheme to attract graduates who want to undertake post-graduate courses so they can teach in classrooms in Wales.

The highest value incentives are targeted toward graduates training to teach physics, chemistry, mathematics, Welsh, computer science and foreign languages who hold a first class degree, with incentives in place for those with 2.1 and 2.2 degrees.

The funding for those wanting to start courses in September 2017 includes:

- The highest value incentives of up to £20,000 to be available for new students starting postgraduate Initial Teacher Education courses in the subjects of mathematics, physics, chemistry and Welsh.
- Those training for subjects of modern foreign languages and ICT will be eligible for incentives of up to £15,000.

Kirsty Williams said:

“To create an education system that is a source of national pride, we must attract the very best to the teaching profession.

“While teacher vacancy rates in Wales are comparatively low, it is important that we attract graduates with specialist knowledge of our priority subjects, such as maths, physics, and computer science. These incentives will help do just that.

“Alongside our reforms to initial teacher education, professional standards and professional learning, these incentives will help to raise the standard of teaching in Wales as part of our national

mission of education reform.”

Kirsty Williams calls on Welsh universities to become Living Wage employers

In her annual remit letter to Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) she has set out her expectations from the higher education sector, including the need for universities to pay their staff the Living Wage.

Currently only one Welsh university is an accredited living wage employer. The Welsh Government has been an accredited Living Wage employer since 2015.

Kirsty Williams said:

“I am ambitious, and confident, that higher education can deliver on our national mission to open up opportunities for all our citizens, raise standards across the board and ensure an education system that is a source of national pride, innovation and confidence.

“The Welsh Government has been an accredited Living Wage employer since 2015. I would also like the Council to begin working with institutions to create a living wage sector. I expect to see rapid progress on this. It is disappointing that only one of our universities is an accredited living wage employer.

“Universities’ commitment to a civic mission requires reach beyond campus and into their host communities. This is not restricted to teaching and research and widening access. It should be demonstrated in how they value their staff and students, and be an example of a progressive and fair employer.

“I would like to see HEFCW work with institutions on these matters, such as procurement, with an emphasis on efficiency, social responsibility and impact, and student, graduate and employer opportunities.”

Last year the Education Secretary called for Welsh universities to reconnect with the communities that surround them.

Free prescriptions are a long term investment in people's health – Vaughan Gething

Since 1 April 2007 prescription medicine has been provided free in Wales. All patients registered with a Welsh GP who get their prescriptions from a pharmacist in Wales are eligible.

The GP is one of a number of frontline clinical experts able to prescribe medication. Others include pharmacists and nurses: prescriptions issued by these are also free of charge.

The decision to abolish prescription charges was taken in light of evidence that some people with serious chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure or heart disease, could not afford their prescriptions and chose to have only part of the prescription dispensed to reduce the cost.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“Free prescriptions were introduced in Wales in 2007 as a long-term investment to improve people's health.

“We were the first of the home nations to take the step to introduce free prescriptions and I'm delighted that both Scotland and Northern Ireland followed our lead.

“We firmly believe by providing people with the medication they need helps to keep them well and out of hospital, thereby reducing the overall cost to the NHS. It should never be the case that people with serious chronic conditions can not afford to collect their prescription.

“Ensuring patients have the medication they need not only improves their own health and wellbeing, it also benefits the health service as a whole by reducing hospital attendance and placing fewer demands on general practitioners.”

“It is socially irresponsible to charge people with serious chronic conditions for the medication they need. Free prescriptions are progressive and an integral part of our health services in Wales.”