

New Transport for Wales Headquarters part of wider work to unleash the potential of Welsh regions

The news comes ahead of a major speech by Ken Skates in which he will say that Wales must grow its regional economies and unleash their potential to drive balanced economic growth across the country.

The Economy Secretary will be addressing a business audience at Coleg y Cymoedd later today and will set out his vision for a prosperous and secure Wales.

Speaking ahead of his speech, Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I’m incredibly proud that during the last Assembly term the Welsh Government directly supported almost 150,000 jobs across the country, with many more in local supply chains.

“That has helped us secure a lower unemployment rate than England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and a faster rate of employment growth than the UK average.

“However as an economy we still face major challenges, particularly in addressing the regional differences in our economy and ensuring that the benefits of economic growth fall more fairly across Wales.

“Since 2010 our approach has focussed on developing key sectors of our economy on a national basis. This has resulted in some stunning successes, particularly in advanced manufacturing areas like aerospace and in the creative industries.

“However, the growth of those sectors and the skilled jobs they have created have not fallen equally across Wales and so now is the time to write the next chapter of Wales’ economic story.

“As we approach the challenges of the future I believe we need to take a new approach by developing the competitive edge of each region of Wales more fully. This will mean empowering each region to develop its own specialised sectors and more distinct economic identities.

"Allied to this we need to change our economic development structures in government to work in closer partnership with those regions, utilising drivers, such as skills, transport connectivity, procurement and digital infrastructure to accelerate economic growth in those areas.

"The way to address these regional differences is not to turn one area against another, but to work together to ensure the fruits of growth are shared by everyone. It's a question of fairness and that's why I want to grow the regional economies of Wales and unleash their potential to drive more balanced growth across the whole of the country. Only that way can we make real our promise of better jobs closer to home and ensure every area of Wales becomes more resilient to the economic challenges we face over the next few years.

"Today I am delighted to announce that the new Transport for Wales headquarters will be located in Pontypridd bringing hundreds of high quality jobs to the area.

"This is great news for the town but it needs to be the start of something bigger. We need to work with partners in the local authority, the private sector as well as local colleges and universities to ensure this injection of jobs becomes a spark for wider local regeneration and prosperity.

"Later today I will meet young people training at the rail engineering centre at Coley y Cymoedd, a £3m partnership between Welsh Government and the college and a great example of the partnership working and forward thinking that is key to regional economic success.

"By looking ahead to the opportunities arising from the £1bn plus we will spend on electrification, Metro and rail infrastructure, we must work together to ensure more of the benefits of that spend remain in our local communities and benefit local supply chains.

"We face major economic challenges which will only be increased by our exit from the EU, global instability, welfare cuts and UK Government austerity.

"Our response must be to work together and to develop more resilient regional economies if we are to build a stronger and

fairer economy for everyone in every area of Wales.

Cabinet Secretary announces Arts Council appointments

The terms of appointment for Ms Kate Eden, Dr Rachel O’Riordan and Mr Dafydd Rhys will commence on 1 April 2017 and will initially last for three years.

ACW Council members are responsible for setting the aims and objectives of the Arts Council, aligning these to the Welsh Government’s strategic priorities and ensuring funding in Wales is invested effectively.

The three new members are in addition to the two members appointed from 1 November 2016 and complement the current membership of the Council. With the appointments the Council will now comprise 13 members plus the Chair, Dr Phil George.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“I am pleased to announce the appointment of these three new Council members. These appointments have enormous personal and professional experience in the arts but come from completely different backgrounds.

“Their individual skills, knowledge and expertise will add significantly to the current strengths of the Council during a period of transition as it faces up to the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Phil George, Chair of ACW added

“I’m delighted to welcome three new members who will bring a wealth of skills and experience, as well as a passion for the arts, to our Council.

“They will be terrific advocates and ambassadors for the arts in Wales and I look forward to their contribution as we strive to ensure that all communities in Wales are able to benefit from and have access to high quality arts.

"We look forward to welcoming them as Council Members to our Council meeting in May."

Two long-serving current members – Dr Kate Woodward and Mrs Margaret Jervis – come to the end of their third and final terms of appointment on 31 March 2017.

Excitement building for school engineering awards

The Tomorrow's Engineers programme, led by the engineering community, provides young people the chance to engage in hands-on activities showcasing the benefits of a career in engineering.

As part of their annual curriculum-linked Robotics challenge, the 11 to 14 year-old students from the Cynon Valley learned how to build, program and control autonomous LEGO robots to complete a series of missions. This has given them first-hand experience of solving real-world engineering, technology and computing challenges, as well as working as part of a team.

Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun, who won their South West region final, have now been invited to compete in the UK final at the Birmingham NEC on Friday (March 17).

Kirsty Williams said,

"This is a brilliant success story and I would like to wish the school and its pupils the best of luck for the final. Their achievements link well with our key ambitions of raising standards in the learning and teaching of science and technology.

"We want our young people to be able to reason scientifically and understand the value of scientific approaches. This is key for the 21st Century, as tested by PISA, and our new curriculum is being designed to better integrate this approach.

"Earlier this year, I announced a new national network of excellence for science and technology aimed at improving pupils' experience of the subjects at school. The network will involve schools working with the science and technology departments of universities, education consortia, further education and other experts to learn from the best practice available."

This success follows on from that of Team Tachyon, a group of year 11 pupils

from Denbigh High, who recently won three awards for Wales at the F1 in Schools World Championships in Austin, Texas.

€6.7m EU boost to improve bathing waters in Ireland and Wales

The Acclimatize project will help to improve the quality of sea shores in both countries, helping to boost tourism and supporting marine activities, including shellfish harvesting.

Led by University College Dublin in partnership with Aberystwyth University, the project will identify sources of pollution and their impact on bathing waters as a result of climate change.

The project has been backed by €5.3m from the EU's Ireland-Wales cooperation programme and will use and develop a range of technologies, including smart real-time predictive tools to monitor water quality to protect human health and the marine environment.

Professor Drakeford said:

“Preserving and enhancing the marine and coastal environment in Wales and Ireland for economic prosperity and enjoyment by current and future generations is of vital importance.

“This is another positive example of how EU funds are supporting local economies and communities by helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change.”

The Acclimatize project will focus on bathing waters, including Dublin Bay and Cemaes Bay in Anglesey and other beaches. Real-time models will be developed to inform the effects of climate change through altered weather patterns, affecting rainfall, temperature and tides which impact on coastal areas.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe, T.D said:

“The Acclimatize project represent an important contribution to enhancing the quality and economic sustainability of the shared resource that is the Irish Sea. It is encouraging to see such EU-funded cross-border projects continuing. The Irish Government is committed to the continued implementation of the Ireland Wales programme.”

Professor Wim Meijer, from University College Dublin, said:

“Working in partnership with Aberystwyth University, the Acclimatize project will make a significant contribution to developing innovative management systems to protect our coastal waters from the impact of climate change.

“This will support economic growth through improved water quality which will lead to a range of benefits, such as increased tourism and shellfish harvesting in Ireland and Wales.”

Promoting Cruise in Wales at a Global event

SeaTrade is the cruise industry’s premier global event and is the only event guaranteed to bring together every facet of the business, including cruise lines, suppliers, travel agents and partners. With 700+ Exhibitors from all over the world, SeaTrade Cruise Global draws in visitors to meet new vendors, and source new products, ideas and solutions.

Cruise is big business for Wales and is worth nearly £3 million to the Welsh economy – 2017 will see 89 cruise calls to Wales with 37,000 passengers and 15,000 crew – an increase in calls of 33% year on year.

Previous attendance at the SeaTrade event has secured further business from new cruise lines who wish to visit Wales.

For the 2017 event, Visit Wales will be promoting the arrival of the Volvo Ocean Race along with Year of the Sea in 2018. Cardiff has been chosen as the destination for the first Volvo Ocean Race transatlantic leg to the United Kingdom in 12 years when the world’s leading offshore race makes its debut visit to Wales in 2018. This around the world yacht race is held every three years and is widely regarded as one of the most challenging endurance events of its kind.

The cruise ship market is big business for Wales – and Cruise Wales and partners are working hard to grow the market. An increasing number of visitors from Germany are coming to south west Wales through cruise ships docking at Swansea, Milford Haven Port, Pembroke and Fishguard. Following Tourism Investment Support Scheme funding for the floating pontoon at Fishguard to allow larger vessels to anchor, Fishguard calls have increased from 5 in 2015 to 31 for 2017.

Cabinet Secretary for the Economy and Infrastructure, Ken Skates, said:

“The cruise market has been highlighted in the tourism strategy for Wales as one way of growing the tourism industry in Wales by 10% by 2020 and Cruise is one of the fastest growing sectors year on year. We are working with many outside stakeholders and are looking at various infrastructure developments for cruise. SeaTrade gives us a great opportunity to keep Wales front of mind with cruise liners, travel agents and partners and to promote Wales as a new product.

The arrival of the Volvo Ocean Race also gives a great platform to talk about what Wales has to offer – but also to promote next year’s Cardiff stopover to an important US audience.”