

£8m extra funding to support Further Education pay

The £8m additional money will also contribute to an increase in pay for support staff in FE colleges, many of whom are on the living wage.

The announcement was made in the Senedd today, during a debate on Further Education in Wales.

Kirsty Williams the Education Secretary said:

“I am delighted that the Welsh Government has been able to provide this additional help to the FE sector for pay over the next two years. We recognise that Colleges are dealing with exceptional circumstances and this additional injection of money will allow the colleges time to budget to cover their own pay costs in future.”

The ‘exceptional circumstances’ relate to UK Government’s award of a pay rise of up to 3.5% to teachers in September. While the Welsh Government fully supports this decision, it was made without consulting the Welsh Government and without providing Wales with the funding to cover the additional costs.

Following negotiations, the UK Government was persuaded to allocate £23.5m over the next two years to address the issue but this does not include those teaching in FE which could potentially create disparity between teachers in sixth forms and teachers delivering the same course in FE Colleges. The Welsh Government has therefore stepped in to make up the difference on this occasion.

£3.2m has been allocated for the 2018-19 financial year, with £4.8m to follow in 2019-20 subject to approval of the final budget for 2019-2020. This will allow the sector 18 months to plan with its trade union partners for the next pay round.

Eluned Morgan, the Minister for Lifelong Learning, who has responsibility for FE said:

“FE plays a valuable role in our educational system and FE Colleges are crucial to our task of creating a generation of people equipped with the skills our economy needs to flourish. We are keen to ensure that those teaching in FE receive a pay rise in line with teachers in our schools. We are particularly pleased that we have also managed to find additional support to pay for the crucial support staff who work in our FE colleges.”

All Wales regulation to tackle agricultural pollution: “a measured and necessary response”’ – Lesley Griffiths

The new Regulations will replicate good practice measures adopted already by many farmers across Wales.

It follows claims by the FUW the announcement on regulations to be introduced next spring is simply a knee-jerk reaction to recent media coverage. The FUW further claimed the Welsh Government is not committed to partnership working.

In response, the Cabinet Secretary has written to the FUW robustly dismissing these claims, which divert attention from the real issue; ongoing pollution from agriculture.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“The issue of agricultural pollution is not new. Despite recent efforts to tackle the issue via voluntary action, we are seeing ever increasing incidents, with in excess of 100 incidents having been recorded annually for a number of years.

“I receive images and correspondence from concerned members of the public on almost a weekly basis during the autumn and winter periods.

“This cannot continue. I have given careful and measured consideration to this matter and concluded a voluntary approach alone is not the answer. To ignore the images and incidents reported would be irresponsible of me as Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs.

“I am clear all organisations with a leadership role in agriculture have a role to play and must do so.

“The FUW’s questioning of the Welsh Government’s commitment to partnership working merely, and perhaps knowingly, diverts attention from the real issue. Agricultural pollution is an industry problem and ultimately a problem only the agriculture industry, with the support from Government and others, can fix.

“My decision has been informed by the analysis of a number of

consultations, the Wales Land Management Forum sub-group report and work from other key stakeholders.

“The sub-group’s report, as well as the continued work of the group since the report, has been fully considered as part of my decision to introduce regulations. I will continue to work in partnership with all who wish to work with me to help address the problem of agricultural pollution.

“Without exception, everyone involved in Welsh agriculture must robustly hold to account the minority who, through their unacceptable behaviour, have such a destructive impact on our environment, the reputation of the agriculture sector and, potentially, as we head towards Brexit, on our brand values.”

High tech Newport building now home to IBM, BT, Nokia and others

The 750,000 sq ft building in Newport was initially specifically built for wafer fabrication production. Its specialist nature meant it was a very difficult property to let or sell which resulted in it remaining empty for many years.

However ten years ago Welsh Government entered into an agreement for lease with Next Generation Data to develop the building into a data centre – an innovative solution which has proven to be immensely successful, with companies such as BT, IBM and Nokia now working at the site.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“This building is a real success story for both NGD and Welsh Government, having turned an unlettable building into something really quite special and economically successful.

“Working alongside Next Generation Data, this is now the site of a state of the art data centre which offers the capabilities and flexibility to meet the specific needs of its customers with great space, power and cooling capacities. For customers, big and small, this means the site offer optimum scale economies, expansive customer facilities and great capacity for growth.

“To now see it home to some of the finest tech and IT providers in the world, with more in the pipeline, is fantastic and bodes incredibly well as we look to ensure our economy is equipped with

the technology and innovation needed to ensure our continued growth and prosperity.”

Next Generation Data provides solutions for clients requiring cloud hosting, private data halls or colocation. It caters for large organisations that require bespoke data halls constructed to the highest standards, through to smaller requirements for pre-built co-location. The NGD site is a highly secure data centre which is future proofed as a result of the modular construction model used.

As Europe’s largest facility, NGD has incredible growth potential and its flexible approach allows it to build to almost any design.

Justin Jenkins, NGD’s Managing Director, said:

“NGD has always benefited from the support of the Welsh Government right from the start of our business 10 years ago when we acquired our current site, a former semiconductor plant. Over the years NGD has invested millions of pounds – with over £40 Million just this year – into transforming the facility into Europe’s largest data centre, successfully attracting some of the world’s largest companies into the region.

“At the same time, we provide employment as well as regular work for hundreds of contractors while also serving the IT needs of a growing number of fast growing local businesses.”

Nearly half of Wales’ electricity came from renewable sources in 2017

Last year the equivalent of 48% of the country’s electricity, a rise from 43% in 2016, came from renewable sources as the country edges towards ambitious targets for clean energy by 2030.

The Energy Generation in Wales 2017 report showed that Wales generated more than twice what it consumed in electricity last year, making Wales a significant exporter of electricity to England, Ireland and the wider European network.

The report, published ahead of a debate in plenary today (Tuesday, 20 November), also showed that:

- 22% of electricity generated was from renewable sources, up from 18% in 2016

- There are more than 67,000 renewable energy projects in Wales with a combined capacity of almost 3,700 MW. 84% of this capacity is renewable electricity, 16% is renewable heat capacity
- Approximately 66% of renewable electricity generated in Wales comes from wind
- Wales produces approximately 2.1 TWh of useable renewable heat, equivalent to 10.5% of Welsh domestic heat demand
- There are over 63,000 locally owned renewable energy projects, with a total capacity of 750 MW. This is a 30% increase in capacity from 2016
- Wales now has 529MW of renewable electricity capacity in local ownership, against a target of 1 GW by 2030

In September last year, the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths announced she wanted Wales to generate 70 per cent of its electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2030. The Cabinet Secretary also set an ambitious target for 1GW of locally owned renewable electricity, and an expectation that all new renewable energy projects should have at least an element of local ownership by 2020.

The Welsh Government is supporting a number of projects through our Welsh Government Energy Service to in a bid to drive more locally owned energy developments. For example, Gower Regeneration's 1 MW solar farm at Dunvant is Wales' first community owned solar farm, whilst the Garreg Llwyd Hill wind farm in Radnorshire can provide electricity for the equivalent of approximately 26,000 homes and provides a significant community benefit fund.

Cabinet Secretary Lesley Griffiths said:

"I am delighted that Wales is continuing to towards our ambitious renewable energy targets and this report shows the impressive progress over the last year.

"With nearly half of our electricity consumption coming from renewable sources, as well as us being over half of the way to meeting our target for renewable electricity capacity in local ownership, we are seeing the huge steps made by the sector.

"As a government we are committed to accelerating the transition of our energy system in Wales, particularly through the increased use of renewable energy. Our priorities are to increase energy efficiency, reduce our reliance on energy generated from fossil fuels and to actively manage the transition to a low carbon economy to benefit Wales."

Wales continues to spend more on key public services

Figures released by the Treasury today, show Wales spends £2,310 per person on health – 6.5% higher than spending per person in England.

Spending on health and social services combined increased by 3.8% in Wales – the highest increase of any of the 4 UK countries, according to the Country and Regional Analysis 2017-18, which is published every year.

Spending on health and social services per person in Wales stood at £2,916, some 11% higher than in England – equivalent to an extra £290 per person in Wales.

Education spending per person in Wales also increased by 1.8% in 2017-18. This is the fastest growth of any of the 4 UK countries.

Education spending per person is now 5% higher in Wales than in England – an extra £65 per person.

Professor Drakeford said:

“These figures show we are maintaining our focus to protect frontline services against the worst impacts of the UK government’s damaging policy of austerity.

“Investing in our NHS and social services is at the heart of our spending plans and today’s figures show our commitment to provide the best care for people across Wales.

“The investment we make in education is a sign of our determination to provide a system in Wales which gives children the best start in life.

“The figures published by HM Treasury are testament to the value we place on public services and highlight our commitment to doing everything we can to help our public services meet the very real challenges they face today.”