

[Press release: Statement from the Secretary of State for Wales in response to Snowdonia helicopter crash](#)

Alun Cairns: Thoughts and deepest sympathies go out to the families of the victims

Snowdonia helicopter crash: Statement from the Secretary of State for Wales, Alun Cairns

My thoughts and deepest sympathies go out to the families of the victims of the helicopter crash in Snowdonia.

I have today spoken to the Acting Chief Constable of North Wales Police to offer the UK Government in Wales' full support to the investigation.

The emergency services and the mountain rescue involved in the search, rescue and recovery operation have carried out their work in incredibly difficult conditions. I am grateful to them for their determination and dedication, and to those providing support to the families during what is a very difficult time.

The recovery operation will be challenging. I ask that the investigating authorities be given the time and space necessary to undertake this important work.

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A report from HMICS has given a damning assessment of the treatment of victims of sexual assault in Scotland.

The review looked into how victims of sexual crime receive medical attention

while forensic evidence is also gathered for possible prosecution.

It found that the services offered in Scotland lagged way behind those in the rest of the UK, and highlighted an urgent need to find appropriate healthcare facilities for forensic medical examinations.

It also mentioned examples of some victims being asked not to wash for a day or more after an assault.

The Scottish Conservatives have said the report must act as a 'wake-up call' for the Scottish Government, and asked them to outline how they plan to improve services in the immediate future.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross MSP said:

"This is a damning report that gives us further insight into the appalling treatment received by victims of sexual assault.

"These individuals have already been through a traumatic experience, so for them to be treated in this manner is simply inexcusable.

"Examples highlighted in the report of victims being asked not to wash for over a day after an assault is cruel in the extreme, and the SNP need to use this as a wake-up call.

"When the facilities in Scotland are described as unacceptable and far worse than those in the rest of the UK, there is no excuse for the catalogue of failings in this report.

"If we don't see improvements soon we risk seeing further examples of victims being let down when they need support the most and possibly deterred from reporting their assault."

You can read the report here:

<http://www.hmics.org/publications/hmics-strategic-overview-provision-forensic-medical-services-victims-sexual-crime>

Wales broadens its horizons attracting €66m to drive innovation

Speaking at a conference to celebrate Welsh successes in the EU-funded programme, he revealed that Welsh activity in Horizon 2020 had doubled in the last year.

A day after Article 50 was triggered, the Finance Secretary called for

continued participation in the programme after the UK leaves the EU – as outlined in the Welsh Government’s White Paper Securing Wales’s Future.

The Welsh Government’s 2016 annual report about Horizon 2020 highlights Wales’ performance in the programme including:

- International collaborations doubled to more than 1,000;
- Around a third of Welsh participations in Horizon 2020 projects are as lead co-ordinators;
- Welsh businesses won more than €10m through the programme;
- A higher proportion of private sector participations than the equivalent in the UK;
- Welsh universities performing well, accounting for 63% of total Welsh participations.

This positive trend has continued into 2017, as the latest figures show Welsh organisations have secured €66m of Horizon 2020 funds and the number of Welsh participations has topped 140.

Professor Drakeford said:

“Horizon 2020 provides a real opportunity for businesses and organisations to be at the forefront of research and innovation. The Welsh Government is committed to supporting Welsh participation in this EU programme.

“Our White Paper, Securing Wales’ Future, highlights the economic importance of retaining UK access to European research and innovation programmes, and their successors, beyond 2020 to help drive world-class science and innovation and sustainable jobs and growth in Wales.”

At the event, the Finance Secretary met businesses including Wrexham-based Ecodek Ltd and Newport-based SPTS Technologies, learning about their ground-breaking work on Horizon 2020 projects, such as recycling of building materials and filtered waste of water treatment plants to develop new, innovative products and the development of semiconductor technologies in innovative new medical devices.

Professor Drakeford added:

“Today is a celebration of Welsh success in Horizon 2020 and the contribution EU funds are making to driving our knowledge economy. It is vital that we continue to maximise the opportunities that this programme presents and attract further investments which will bring significant benefits to our region.”

Horizon 2020 is open for business – successful applications made while the UK remains part of the EU will be protected by the UK Government’s lifetime

expenditure guarantee.

The Welsh Government's SCoRE Cymru fund provides financial support to help Welsh organisations with travel costs to forge partnerships and to develop Horizon 2020 proposals.

Improved arrangements to support those affected by contaminated blood announced

The new arrangements will provide broader assistance over and above financial support by offering a support service for every affected individual. This will help individuals with difficulties accessing healthcare services, home or travel insurance, other financial benefits or suitable public services. Arrangements will also address concerns about discretionary funding. All regular payments will be increased to include an amount towards additional expenses such as increased winter fuels, treatment (travel/overnight accommodation) and insurance (personal/travel).

More will also be done to support those who have been bereaved, especially important during the early years when distress and financial difficulty may be greatest.

The one-off payment will be retained and, in addition, spouses, civil partners or partners will receive 75% of the regular payments for three years after bereavement. For the newly bereaved, payments will reflect the regular payment rate at the time of death. For those bereaved in earlier years, the 2016-17 rate will be applied and one payment made in full.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“Today’s announcement brings an end to the uncertainty about support in future and will introduce a new scheme that is supportive, transparent and as equitable as possible.

“We’ve taken account of the views expressed by those affected which have helped shape the new arrangements, giving us a deeper understanding of the impact of the tragedy on their lives and those of their families in many cases.”

The new scheme will be administered by Velindre NHS Trust through the NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership.

Wales’ beneficiaries will transfer to the new scheme that will operate from

October 2017. Enhanced regular payments (annual, quarterly or monthly) will be backdated to April 2017.

Welsh Government officials will work with HM Revenue and Customs and the Department of Works and Pensions to ensure that future payments continue to be exempt from taxation liability or state benefits entitlement calculations.

They will continue to work also with the Department of Health and the current scheme administrators to ensure the transition to the new scheme is as smooth as possible.

[Richard Burgon responds to the latest legal aid statistics](#)

Richard

Burgon MP, Labour's Shadow Justice Secretary, responding to the latest legal aid statistics, said:

“Under the Conservatives, legal advice and representation is becoming a privilege for the wealthy few.

“Many ordinary people dealing with difficult issues are no longer able to receive the legal assistance they need and deserve.

“This Tory Government must stop dragging their feet and get on with the long-awaited review of their disastrous cuts to legal aid.

“Labour

is supporting the Bach Commission in working to design a 21st century justice system which protects rather than penalises those who need advice, representation and justice.”