

Head teachers have more time to focus on leadership thanks to School Business Managers

Funded as part of the School Business Managers pilot and the Small and Rural Schools Grant, the business support officers take on some of the administrative and organisational tasks that head teachers would usually undertake.

This allows head teachers to manage their workload better, meaning more time to focus on leading teaching and learning, raising standards, and improve pupil performance within schools.

The meeting took place at Ysgol Dyffryn Conwy in Llanrwst , where the 3 business support officers in charge of the Conwy Valley school cluster are based.

Now a year into their employment, the business support officers are already making a big difference to the 21 schools within the cluster.

Speaking after the meeting, Kirsty Williams said:

“I’m really grateful for the opportunity to meet with the school business managers and head teachers to hear first-hand the effects the programme has had on the schools they are responsible for.”

“It is encouraging to see how Conwy has used its grant to provide additional administrative support to free up time for the head teachers of primary schools to focus on leadership and management.”

“I am also extremely pleased to see that 70% of head teachers that have taken advantage of this project have reported that they have seen reduced workloads in terms of administrative tasks, and that this has led to more co-operation between primary schools.”

Delyth Williams Business Manager at Ysgol Dyffryn Conwy said:

“This scheme makes a real difference in schools.

“The introduction of Business Support Officers within our schools has allowed us to be released from our higher administrative tasks, meaning that we can focus more of our time on leadership.

“Not only has this helped to raise standards and improve the performance of the learners, it has also been a big help in contributing to the sustainability of our small and rural schools.

“The benefits associated with the SBM goes hand in hand with the ‘cluster model’ approach adopted for schools in Conwy, as it encourages and supports school-to-school working, enabling head teachers to share good practice and collaborate to maximise capacity and share expertise.”

“The UK government must urgently change its position on devolving air passenger duty to Wales” – Finance Minister

APD has been fully devolved to Scotland and in part to Northern Ireland but it remains under the control of the UK government in Wales.

The Welsh Government has long argued it should have powers over APD, enabling it to attract more flights to Wales.

But UK ministers have said it would give Cardiff an unfair advantage over other regional UK airports. These concerns have been debunked by independent research.

Speaking ahead of her session at the Welsh Affairs Committee, Finance Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“Despite the Welsh Government’s repeated calls to the UK Government about APD, a decision has still not been made. Scotland, Northern Ireland and England all control APD to different extents – there is no justification for Wales being treated differently.

“There is unanimous support for the devolution of APD to Wales from aviation, tourism and business sectors in Wales and it’s time the UK government stopped stalling and changed its position as a matter of urgency.”

Last month the Economy and Transport Minister Ken Skates submitted a statement from the Council for Economic Development to the Welsh Affairs Committee, which is conducting an inquiry about APD, in support of devolving the tax to Wales.

Ken Skates said:

“The UK government’s failure to devolve APD continues to place unjustifiable constraints on our ability to promote Wales to overseas markets and support growth in the aviation sector and wider economy.

“We want the UK government to stop seeing devolution of APD as a barrier and more of an opportunity. Devolution would be a win for Cardiff Airport; for Wales and for the UK.”

The devolution of APD to Wales is consistent with the UK government’s policy of supporting the aviation sector to make a significant contribution to the economic growth of the country and the UK economy and aligns with other taxes, which have been devolved to Wales.

Building relationships to sell Wales to the world

The aim is to build relationships with the travel trade in key markets and show what Wales has to offer as a holiday destination for 2020 and beyond:

- International presence more important than ever
- Announcing 2020 as Year of Outdoors

During the event, Visit Wales will announce that its next themed year from 2020 will be Year of Outdoors – which will reinforce Wales’ strengths of adventure, culture and the outdoors.

Year of Outdoors will follow on from Year of Discovery 2019, when visitors are being invited to discover something new about Wales. 2019 has got off to a great start, with the Sunday Times Magazine choosing Wales as one of the rising stars of 2019. Wales has also been placed 10th in a list by the Rough Guides of the most beautiful places in the world and has been named as the ‘Next Big Thing’ in the Delta Sky magazine which reaches six million travellers and last week TripAdvisor named three Welsh beaches in a list of Top 10 UK Beaches:- Barafundle; Rhossili; Newborough.

In response to industry feedback, there will be a shift to a two-year cycle for themes from 2020. The themed years have been supported by the industry, and are providing a clear focus for collaboration, joint-working and product change across Wales – with a longer cycle allowing more opportunities for bigger projects and ideas.

Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

“Our research shows that Wales is famous for its scenery and nature – and the theme will build on this strength by showcasing our outstanding natural landscapes.

Wales is now well-known for its world-leading adventure, and the Year of Outdoors will provide a platform for showing that our stunning, vibrant landscape is alive with activities and things to do. We know that taking part in outdoor activities has significant health benefits and we’ll be encouraging the people of Wales and our visitors to take part in activities to enrich their wellbeing.

It isn’t just about wide empty spaces either – our landscape is shaped by our people and communities, and celebrating the relationship between culture, heritage, language and place will be a major part of the year.”

New developments which have been funded through the EU programme, Tourism Attractor Destination scheme, will open during 2020 including, the Dŵr Cymru’s Llys y Frân site in West Wales. Llys y Frân will become a must visit park offering land and water-themed outdoor activities and an education recreational site.

In addition to this, Porthcawl and Saundersfoot will enhance their existing experiences with the investment of a maritime and coastal centre providing more things for the visitors to do and see. And Pendine will see the opening of the new Speeds of Sand Visitor Centre and Eco accommodation.

Year of Outdoors will celebrate Wales’ outstanding natural landscapes which are alive with world-leading adventure and a distinctive, contemporary culture. The 870 mile Coastal Path; three National Parks; 600 Castles; Outstanding Areas of Natural Beauty and Dark Sky Reserves – are all set to be enjoyed in 2020.

Presence at ITB Berlin follows a successful visit to Vakantiebeurs in Utrecht during January, as well as a successful UK Inbound Convention. Visit Wales’ work with international partners and attendance at key events plays an important part in building relationships and showcasing what Wales has to offer.

Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism Lord Elis-Thomas, continued:

“Never has it been more important to bridge Wales culturally, digitally and physically to the world. The travel trade is extremely important in our bid to grow tourism to Wales, especially our share of international visits – building relationships with tour operators for Wales is a key focus for us.

As well as growing the volume and value of visitors to Wales, the travel trade can help us with addressing particular challenges – such as spreading visitors throughout the year, all-across Wales

and increasing the time visitors stay in Wales – resulting in higher spend.”

Research shows the long term benefits of Visit Wales’ work with the Travel Trade. Figures show that the value of business in 2017 delivered by the top 100 international operators influenced by Visit Wales was up 24% at £11.2 million (from £9 million in 2016). The total value of business to Wales delivered by this group in 2017 was £18.1 million.

£2m to improve mental health and well-being at Welsh universities

The funding has been provided to improve support for students and staff in higher education providers. Institution-wide initiatives such as training staff in well-being and mental health awareness and promoting health information on campus should benefit from the funding, in addition to safeguarding students at risk of harm.

The funding will be allocated through the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

The Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, said:

“For most students, university is a joyous experience where new friendships are forged, careers paths are chosen and lessons are learned, both inside and outside the lecture theatre. But it is also a time of transition which can bring its own challenges, such as living away from home for the first time, managing finances or coping with exam pressures.

“This funding will boost the care and support universities provide students, by intervening or offering support if or when they need it, helping them achieve their goals unhindered and getting the most from their university experience.”

Gwyneth Sweatman, NUS Wales President, said:

“Student mental health has been a priority for me as NUS Wales President, and for our member students’ unions across Wales, this year. I very much welcome the Welsh Government’s £2 million investment in improving student mental health and well-being.

“I hope that universities will be able to use this funding to

improve the support and services they offer students, such as bilingual and online support. It's also important that students are able to access support and services across different campuses.

"I am keen to see more frontline academic and non-academic staff given training on mental health, and local public services working in closer partnership with universities.

"Wales is the perfect size for universities, students, and the mental health sector to work together to make sure that every student in Wales, no matter where or how they study, is able to access the services and support they need to stay in education.

"I am looking forward to continuing to work on this important agenda alongside the Welsh Government, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), universities, and our member students' unions."

Dr David Blaney, Chief Executive of the HEFCW, said:

"In the same way schools can help pupils, and employers provide services for staff, it is only right that universities are well-equipped to support their large and diverse student populations. This is part of a suite of targeted support from HEFCW, recognising the unique position universities play in the daily lives of students. From early personal and academic interventions to support following any challenges they might have faced, this funding can make a real difference to lives."

Amanda Wilkinson, Director of Universities Wales, said:

"Universities Wales are very impressed by all the excellent work being done by student support and welfare services across Welsh Universities, particularly in a challenging environment where the proportion of people disclosing mental health issues has significantly increased across the UK.

"This year universities in Wales have been working with HEFCW to develop a Wales-wide approach to promoting good mental health and well-being. Today's announcement is very welcome and will help Welsh universities tackle the complex challenges in these areas."

Minister launches new ePassport gates at Cardiff Airport

The latest-technology e-gates have been funded by the Welsh Government. They will permit travellers with biometric passports to bypass manual inspections, allowing for a quicker entry into Wales.

Although Cardiff International Airport Ltd (CIAL) was one of the first airports in the UK to introduce e-gate technology, the three original gates were removed by the UK Border Force in 2017 as the initial technology was superseded.

UK Government allows ePassport gates to be fitted free of charge by UK Border Force only at airports with more than two million in-bound passengers a year, such as Bristol and Heathrow, so UK Border Force required a substantial capital payment from Cardiff Airport to install replacement e-gates.

The Welsh Government has provided funding of up to £1m for the latest technology ePassport gates to be installed at Cardiff Airport.

Visiting Cardiff Airport to launch the new e-gates, Economy and Transport Minister, Ken Skates said:

“Passenger numbers at Cardiff Airport have increased by 60% since Welsh Government purchased the airport in 2013. The number of destinations has also increased significantly with over 50 direct route destinations and links to over 900 connecting destinations being offered, including a scheduled daily long-haul Qatar Airways flight to its Doha hub.

“The new ePassport gates are an important part of our No Deal Brexit planning. They will help ensure queuing in immigration is minimised should the UK Government not secure a seamless departure from the EU.

“This smoother entry to Wales, and subsequently the UK, enhances the customer experience, whilst meeting all UK Border Force requirements.

“We stepped in to grant fund the e-gates when the UK Government refused to do so. Westminster’s decision not to fund e-gates in Cardiff whilst funding them in competing regional airports in England needs to be seen alongside its decisions to block our attempt to establish a network of Public Service Obligation air routes to cities across the UK and not to support devolution of Air Passenger Duty (APD) to Wales based on flawed economic analysis.

“We want the UK Government to stop seeing devolution of APD to Wales as a barrier and more as an opportunity, as they have done in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Devolution of APD would be a win for Cardiff Airport, for Wales and for the UK. Devolution will allow us to focus on our key Economic Action Plan goal of better connecting Wales with the rest of the UK and the wider world. In fact, my colleague Rebecca Evans, the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd, will stand before the Welsh Affairs Committee tomorrow

(Thursday 7th), to give oral evidence in favour of our case for devolution of APD to Wales.

“We are also looking to reverse the decision of the UK Government to prevent us from creating a network of domestic air routes, aimed at better connecting Cardiff to other parts of the UK.

“The UK Government has for too long distorted the market in favour of larger airports. Future devolution of APD would go some of the way to levelling the playing field, which has been skewed in favour of other large airports in England.”

Cardiff Airport chief executive officer Deb Barber said: “Cardiff Airport has been on a continuous journey of transformation over the past few years, during which time we have seen incumbent airlines such as KLM, TUI and Ryanair adding capacity, welcomed new airlines and seen new routes added to our route network – including a regular flight to Doha with Qatar Airways which creates vital links between Wales and the Middle East.

“Significant developments such as these, plus the extensive improvements we have made to the terminal and infrastructure, reflect our long-term vision to deliver a successful airport for Wales and a key gateway to the UK.

“It is essential therefore, that we have modern and efficient technology in place at the UK Border to create a safe, secure and seamless entry point into Wales for international passengers that is on a par with other larger regional airports in the UK. The unveiling today of our new ePassport gates is a very positive step forward in our long term strategy for growth and we are grateful to the Welsh Government for their support.”