

Economy Secretary committed to working with business to make Wales' economy stronger

Speaking at an event at Money Penny, which brought businesses from across North Wales together, the Economy Secretary said he wanted – in collaboration with the business sector – to find new ways of working that break down traditional barriers and borders.

The Economy Secretary said:

“My Economic Action Plan sets out a clear blue print of how we can drive inclusive growth and future proof the economy in all areas of Wales.

“With the plan now published, our Economic Contract and Economy Futures Fund now launched, and our Fair Work Commission and Expert Panel on Automation in operation we have made excellent progress on the first phase of implementation on the plan.

“My focus now is on delivering the wider objectives of that plan and part of this is finding new ways of working that break down traditional barriers and borders such as the ones between government departments, between local authorities, between governments and across borders.

“For me, the next phase of devolution in Wales has to be about helping businesses to trade, invest and develop their people in creative ways that promote new collaboration and new relationships across borders.

“This is a challenge for Government and it is one I am committed to taking on, with business, over the coming years in order to make our economy stronger.

“I also want to continue my focus on supporting the rise of Wales' regions in order to stimulate new opportunities and growth.

“We know a “one size fits all” approach will not give us the economic growth we need and this was very much in my mind when I visited Stena Line in Holyhead, BioComposites in Gwalchmair, Bee Robotics in Caernarfon and Siemens Healthcare in Llanberris to hear their views on the real opportunities and challenges facing North Wales.

“I want to build a genuine partnership approach that will enrich and empower the local economy and overcome obstacles. A partnership approach like the one shown between the Welsh

Government, Wrexham Council and Glyndwr University this week through our collective plans for a business and transport hub at Wrexham General that will open up new and exciting opportunities for jobs and commercial growth.”

The Economy Secretary also said the Welsh Government would be looking at how it could develop indicative budgets for economic development and infrastructure in the regions across Wales.

In thanking Money Penny for hosting this business event, Ken Skates added:

“Our Economic Action Plan is all about public investment with a social purpose and helping business to prepare for the future.

“Money Penny, in the way they support their employees, the way they bring new talent into the business and the way they are planning for the future is a great example of a business doing things the right thing and I am grateful for their co-operation and hospitality.”

Rachel Clacher, co-founder of Money Penny, the world’s leading outsourced communications provider in Wrexham said:

“We were delighted to host the Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, here at Money Penny and hear about the plans to work more closely with businesses to encourage trade, investment, and development of people in Wales. We look forward to continuing to strengthen our relationship with the government and local businesses to help further improve everyone’s future.”

Food and Fun scheme offered to 2,500 pupils in most deprived parts of Wales

The funding, announced today by Education Secretary Kirsty Williams, will go towards the Food and Fun/Bwyd a Hwyl scheme – a school-based programme that sees schools providing breakfast, lunch, education about healthy eating and a range of different activities for pupils to keep learning and keep active.

The £500,000 is part of a match funding arrangement involving local authorities and participating schools.

An estimated 2,500 learners will take part in the scheme which will run in approximately 56 schools, covering 16 local authorities and all 7 Local Health Boards. Approximately 1500 children benefited from the scheme in 2017.

Food and Fun / Bwyd a Hwyl will run in two special schools this year and two local authorities will receive additional grant funding for special needs provision.

One of the aims of the scheme is to help close the attainment gap between pupils from deprived communities and those from more prosperous areas.

The Welsh Government has worked closely with the Welsh Local Government Association to distribute the funding.

Kirsty Williams said:

“The summer holidays can be a difficult time for some of our young people because they don’t have access to the kind of meals they would get in school. In some cases they could even miss out on meals.

“Activities and different play schemes can also be very costly and this means that once again pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds could lose out.

“The Food and Fun/Bwyd a Hwyl scheme is an ideal way for pupils to get two healthy meals a day as well as a wide range of food education, physical activity and other fun sessions. They also get to make the most of local school facilities.

“Being able to eat healthily and keeping active and engaged also makes a real difference to pupils’ attainment when they go back to school in September.

“Reducing this attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers is at the heart of our national mission for education. That’s why I’m so pleased to announce this funding today and look forward to visiting the schools taking part over the summer.”

Councillor Debbie Wilcox, WLGA Leader said:

“The Summer school holidays can often be a daunting time for families who are already struggling to make ends meet. The Food and Fun programme has firmly established itself in recent years not only as a fun and healthy way for children to socialise with their friends, but also as a lifeline for those families.

“By working together with colleagues in health and Welsh Government, and with the investment announced by Welsh Government,

I look forward to seeing more children than ever take part in the Food and Fun programme.”

[£7.3m EU-backed package to boost Wales' food sector](#)

Led by Aberystwyth University's Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) the investment will support two initiatives, Future Foods and BioInnovation Wales.

BioInnovation Wales will receive over £3m EU funds to help employers address high level skills shortages in the agri-food and biotech sector.

BioInnovation Wales, in partnership with Swansea University, will target people already working in the sector, offering bespoke qualifications and industry accredited skills tailored to industry needs. This includes technicians, consultants, researchers and managers working in the food and biotechnology supply chain.

Future Foods will receive £1.9m EU funds to drive forward growth among Welsh food businesses, improving their competitiveness through research, science and technology.

Future Foods, working with BIC Innovation, will deliver world class expertise in food science, technology, and nutrition research and development to ambitious Welsh based businesses seeking to develop healthy, market creating products targeted at UK and international markets.

Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

“The agri-food and biotech sectors are vital to Wales. Investing in high level skills and research to drive forward these sectors is essential for economic growth and jobs, ensuring businesses are on the cutting edge of innovation and competitiveness. I am really pleased that focus areas will include consumer wellbeing and healthier products, assuring product quality and food safety and protection from food fraud”

Professor Mike Gooding, IBERS Director, said:

“We welcome this comprehensive EU funding package at a crucial time for the food and agriculture sector. This is a vote of confidence

in the expertise of IBERS and its partners, enabling us to make science accessible to more companies in Wales to further develop their employee skills, and to create innovative, healthy products that are fit for the future”.

Further funding will come from the University and partners involved in the projects, including BIC Innovation.

Superfast Cymru delivers to almost 733,000 homes and businesses

Superfast Cymru has provided almost 733,000 premises across Wales with access to fast fibre broadband, Leader of the House with responsibility for digital Julie James announced today.

Of these 717,000 can achieve speeds of at least 30Mbps with the remainder achieving speeds of at least 24Mbps.

Wales has also been at the forefront of deploying fibre to the premises technology with nearly 48,700 of the total number of premises given access this way, all of which are now capable of receiving speeds of over 100Mbps.

None of the almost 733,000 premises would have received access to fast fibre broadband without the intervention of Superfast Cymru, a partnership between the Welsh Government, Openreach, European Regional Development Fund and UK Government.

Over half of all homes and businesses across Wales now with access to fast fibre broadband have it as a direct result of Superfast Cymru which could only go where commercial companies had no plans to do so. When combined with commercial rollout the vast majority of premises in Wales can now access the technology.

Julie James said:

“Superfast Cymru has undoubtedly been a success and has delivered a real step change in the availability of superfast broadband across the whole country. Of all those with access in Wales over half are as a result of our intervention – that in itself shows the positive impact this programme has had.

“Whole local authority areas would have been untouched by superfast broadband rollout without Superfast Cymru – now there is not one local authority area without access. Wales has some of the highest speeds in the UK in remote areas with the use of Fibre to the

Premises.

“Deploying broadband at this scale and pace in the Welsh landscape, particularly rural areas, has proved extremely challenging and innovative solutions have had to be used at times such as drones.

“While the programme has successfully changed the digital landscape in Wales, I am very aware that there remain premises without access and we are now working on how to reach these.”

Kim Mears, managing director for Openreach, said:

“We’re very proud of what we’ve delivered in Wales.

“Superfast Cymru was an enormous engineering project with a complex set of challenges, but our engineers have risen to the task, delivering one of the outstanding digital network roll-outs in Europe.

“Building fast and reliable broadband infrastructure is another step towards Wales becoming a truly united and connected nation. Thanks to this project, homes and businesses in some of the most rural parts of Wales now have fast and reliable connections that will support all manner of data-hungry services and applications, such as telehealth, virtual and augmented reality and smart home devices, for decades into the future.

“Fibre broadband coverage has more than doubled as a result of our roll-out, and Wales now has the largest full fibre to the home footprint in Britain.

“Wales can confidently claim to having better superfast broadband coverage than Germany, France, Spain and Italy, but we’re also mindful that some communities are still waiting to gain access to better connections. We’re more determined than any other business to reach these remaining areas and we’ll continue to offer a solution through our Community Fibre Partnership programme. We’re also committed to exploring the alternatives with Welsh Government to make decent broadband a reality for all.”

[Economic Action Plan delivering for North East Wales](#)

Plans for a new major Transport and Business Hub for Wrexham, the

establishment of a new north Wales business unit for Transport for Wales, the Business Wales Entrepreneurship Hub, and the opening of a new headquarters building for the Development Bank for Wales, are among the benefits for the region resulting from the new approaches of the Economic Action Plan.

Speaking ahead of a keynote speech on progress of the Economic Action Plan to a business audience at the Moneypenny offices in Wrexham, the Economy Secretary said:

“Our Economic Action Plan is clear about our focus on public investment with a social purpose, about the value of a partnership approach and about our absolute commitment to developing the economic strengths of our regions.

“With that in mind I am delighted to announce the Welsh Government will be working with Transport for Wales, Wrexham Council and Glyndwr University on plans to develop a new Transport and Business Hub to totally regenerate the area around Wrexham General Station.

“Together, and under a new partnership agreement, all parties will work to develop a masterplan that enhances and integrates transport links in and around the station and opens up new and exciting opportunities for jobs and commercial growth.

“With the first meeting of the partnership set to happen in September, I hope to report progress on this exciting work very soon.

“I am also pleased to confirm that Transport for Wales will establish a North Wales business unit in Wrexham, creating 30 new jobs by the end of 2019.

“And with the Business Wales Entrepreneurship Hub opening last month and the Development Bank opening its Wrexham headquarters in the Autumn and bringing with it 50 high quality jobs, and there is indisputable proof of our economic policies delivering for Wrexham.”

Speaking about the plans for Wrexham General, Councillor Mark Pritchard, Leader of Wrexham Council, said:

“This is a potential game-changer for Wrexham, and will have a massive impact on our economic future.

“Good transport links are a vital part of a healthy economy, helping businesses connect with suppliers, clients and employees, and creating more job options for people by allowing them to commute and travel to work.

“This is a tremendous opportunity for the county borough, and a

great example of the council, Welsh Government, Glyndwr University and other organisations working together to benefit the people of Wrexham and North Wales.”

Wrexham Glyndwr University Vice-Chancellor, Professor Maria Hinfelaar said:

“These proposals are very exciting and come at a crucial time for Wrexham. As a University, we have just unveiled our £60 million Campus 2025 strategy, which is designed to provide a fit for purpose and attractive learning environment for our students – and to provide a wider benefit for the whole area.

“It is great news for Wrexham that our proposals will dovetail with the Welsh Government’s plans for investment and infrastructure improvements set out today. We are delighted to be working with them, Wrexham Council and Transport for Wales to help drive our town, and our region, forward. In a few years’ time, Wrexham will be transformed.”

The Economy Secretary also announced that the work of the Deeside Enterprise Zone, is being extended to ensure continuity of delivery and enable a seamless transition to a broader means of supporting economic development in Flintshire and Wrexham, mirroring the merger of the two Enterprise Zones in the North West of Wales next year.