

Access to EU markets post Brexit on Export Conference agenda

At the second Wales Export Conference of 2018 , which is being held in Conwy, the Economy Secretary will tell businesses about the Welsh Government's proactive approach to helping companies prepare for life after Brexit.

Speaking ahead of the conference, the Economy Secretary said:

“There is little doubt that the impact of Brexit will be felt for some years after we leave the UK. While we are doing all we can to push for Welsh businesses to have continued full and unfettered access to the Single Market, we are working hard to prepare businesses for a variety of outcomes and today's conference is just one element of that proactive approach.

“Regardless of whether companies have been selling their goods and services all over the world for many years, or are new to exporting, whether they are focussing their export efforts on European markets or setting their sights further afield, they will be able to access support and advice at this Export Conference that is tailor made to suits their needs.

“Of course our exporting companies have questions about trading relationships post Brexit, and we are pushing the UK Government to achieve the best trading deal possible, but we are also working to future proof companies so, whatever the outcome of UK negotiations, they can rise to the challenges and opportunities ahead.

“This week I was pleased to launch our Economic Contract, to help us build a new and dynamic relationship with business. The Contract includes five Calls to Action to help businesses to prepare for the future, and one of these is specifically focussed on driving up levels of trade and exports.

“We know the results of increased exports really can be transformative for businesses and their long term chances of success. We want to work with companies right across Wales to help them build up this arm of their business, while continuing to promote Wales as an outward facing and globally trading nation that remains very much open for business.”

Companies attending the conference will hear from North Wales' based companies Ruth Lee, Silverlining Furniture and Air Covers who have seen significant growth in their businesses after focussing on exporting. There will also be presentations from the Northern Powerhouse.

Up to £160m to unlock stalled sites for SME house builders

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans announced the fund at the SME Builder Breakfast Roadshow at Parc Y Scarlets, Llanelli, an event showcasing the support on offer to small and medium sized building firms in Wales.

The £40m loan fund has a four year repayment term, and is projected to be recycled four times over seventeen years, underlining the Welsh Government's long term commitment to supporting small and medium-sized builders to deliver homes and skilled jobs across the country.

Research in 2015 suggested there were potentially 7,600 homes on nearly 400 sites across Wales, where progression has been halted for a wide range of reasons, from pre development works and economic viability, to challenges in securing affordable funding. These are known as stalled sites, most of which are suitable for the SME sector to develop. Stalled sites could be unlocked through investment and support at an early stage, such as groundwork, infrastructure improvement or simply assisting with cash flow.

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“The Stalled Sites Fund provides £40m of funding to address this gap in the market and through recycling of this investment will make up to £160m available to SMEs over 17 years to help them build more homes in Wales.

“We know that supporting small and medium-sized builders has a knock-on effect on the local economy, as they in turn use local suppliers to source materials and skills.

“That's why we are targeting smaller builders at this roadshow in Llanelli. Working with the Federation of Master Builders and local builder's merchants LBS, we are setting out exactly what help is available to SMEs to grow and develop.

“We are committed to delivering 20,000 affordable homes in Wales during this term of government, and SME builders are key to helping us achieve this. By supporting them to develop more sites, we won't just be supporting them to increase the supply of housing, but to grow their businesses, support more skilled jobs and contribute to the local economy.

“We know that many SMEs moved away from house building following the recession ten years ago and have not returned to development. I believe this fund can help them to do this, ensuring a diverse

housing sector and more homes being built.”

Show time for Show Dogs

Supported through the Welsh Government’s Media Investment Budget, Show Dogs is a family comedy telling the story of Max, a tough K9 officer from NYPD forced to go undercover to thwart the kidnapping of a baby panda and will be released across the UK on 25 May.

BAFTA Cymru are hosting the event in partnership with Welsh Government.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I’m delighted that Wales’ significant part in delivering this feature film is being recognised with a preview screening in Cardiff. A significant amount of principal photography took place at Pinewood Studio Wales, with the production spending in excess of £4.3 million on Welsh crew, facilities and locations and providing yet another opportunity to showcase Welsh talent to an international audience.

“Released last week in America, the film will be shown in cinemas across the UK to coincide with the half term holiday. It is already a success in terms of its impact on the Welsh economy and I hope to see this success replicated on screen.”

Hannah Raybould, Director of BAFTA Cymru said:

“It is going to be wonderful to see the reactions of the guests and their families at this special event and we are looking forward to working with Welsh Government and partners Into Film Cymru and DRESO to offer access to the evening and celebrate the work of the Welsh crew members who worked in diverse roles such as locations management, make up and the production office.”

Cardiff sees first electric bus take

charge

Today, speculation will end as it is put to use when Cardiff welcomes its first electric bus into the city.

Running as part of an eight-week trial, the state-of-the-art Volvo 7900E will run along the regular Route 6, taking passengers from the civic centre, via the city centre and on to the scenic Cardiff Bay.

The project is being run in collaboration between the Welsh Government, Cardiff Council, Cardiff Bus, Volvo (the suppliers of the bus) and ABB who have provided the charging station. Both Volvo Bus and ABB will be bearing the costs of the vehicle, the infrastructure, its transport and commissioning and the fuel for the generator.

This trial's key objective is to prove an electric vehicle can operate using opportunity charging on an allocated route and that the infrastructure can be installed in Cardiff and other Welsh cities, potentially to be rolled out on a wider scale.

The aims of the trial are to provide evidence that the introduction of electric vehicles in Wales can provide both financial and environmental benefits, and that the vehicle can complete the route with no disturbance to the schedule.

Economy and Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

"I am delighted to welcome Volvo and ABB to Cardiff, and grateful to Cardiff Bus for taking the lead in this exciting development in city transport.

"There have been a number of such trials around the UK, but this is the first in Wales. We have to stress test this demonstration project, and the late Bank Holiday weekend should be the ideal opportunity to put this vehicle through its paces.

"This is a first step towards our Economic Action Plan commitment to achieve zero carbon buses within ten years. I have every confidence the data will support the fact that electric vehicles can deliver a high-quality service, with measurable improvements in air quality along the participating route.

"Volvo brings its bus into Cardiff just in time to bring visitors to the Bay to welcome the Volvo Ocean Boat Race. This is the first time in a history spanning four decades that this thrilling event has stopped in Wales, and it is fitting we welcome the boat race and the bus to our city in the same week."

The Minister for Environment, Hannah Blythyn, said:

“Improving air quality is one of my top priorities. I’m delighted the Welsh Government and Cardiff Council are working with businesses to present innovative solutions to reduce vehicle pollution and improve air quality in our city centres. The new buses complement our recent consultation on Clean Air Zones which will aim to tackle excess levels of roadside nitrogen dioxide.”

£3 million investment to replace non-compliant ACM cladding on housing association tower blocks

The three residential high-rise buildings are the only ones in the Welsh social housing sector confirmed as having Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) systems corresponding with those which failed large-scale combustibility tests.

Rebecca Evans said:

“Since the terrible events at Grenfell Tower last year, we have worked closely with local authorities, building owners, managers, both the private and third sectors and others to gather a full and accurate picture of high-rise residential buildings in Wales, and to ensure that owners and agents are aware of Government safety guidance and taking necessary action.

“Newport City Homes acted quickly to safeguard residents, putting in place a number of fire safety measures, including fitting sprinklers. Now it’s our turn to support them with this investment, which will enable Newport City Homes to continue their commitment to resident safety, without compromising their vital plans to build more social housing in the city.”