

# Quality Assurance Scheme to have increased focus on the visitor experience

Visit Wales will soon begin to roll out revised Quality Assurance guidelines – ensuring that Quality Assurance Schemes remain relevant and informative as well as supporting businesses and consumers in a globally changing and competitive marketplace. The revised guidelines follow a review undertaken by the national tourism organisations of Wales, England, Scotland & Northern Ireland and the AA. The review was called for due to changing trends for both businesses and visitors – with greater use of user-generated content; online booking engines and consumer review scoring systems as well as the greater diversity of accommodation now on offer.

Following customer and industry feedback, the revised schemes will see more emphasis on the quality of experience with less emphasis on the provision of facilities. The roll-out of the new criteria for the serviced and self-catering sectors will begin in April 2018 with the aim of increasing participation in the various schemes.

As part of the shift in the Quality Assurance approach, Visit Wales will phase-in new signs and materials to enable businesses to showcase their quality star-rating to guests. The suite of new materials, which have been updated to reflect the award-winning Cymru Wales brand style, include new starred plaques; contemporary certificates; and digital badges and logos. Businesses do not need to request the new materials – they will be issued and introduced over the summer; and customers are advised to look out for the Draig Goch logo on hotels, B&Bs, guest and bunk-houses when they book, as a trusted mark of quality.

In visiting the Lake Vyrnwy Hotel today [Monday 26 March] the Tourism Minister said:

“Quality is integral to the future success of tourism in Wales – and one way of ensuring we meet with customer expectations and demand in addition to helping the industry strive to be the best they possibly can – is through our Quality Assurance scheme. Although it was acknowledged at a UK level that the schemes needed to change, it was also the consensus across all national tourism organisations that offering an independent assessment of facilities and services is still important. Our grading schemes are about confidence – confidence in what we have to offer, confidence in how we are offering it and confidence that those who visit Wales will experience a high quality, memorable experience.

“I’m delighted to be in mid Wales today – at the beginning of what will hopefully be a busy Easter for the industry. The impression

I've had over the last few months is of an industry full of commitment and enthusiasm and I believe that by working in partnership we can build on the success we have achieved in recent years. I've also recently met with the chairs of the four Regional Tourism Fora, and I'm confident that this structure works for the future development and marketing of tourism. I've had the opportunity today to reassure colleagues in mid Wales that I have no intention of changing this structure. I wish the industry a busy and prosperous Easter."

Anthony Rosser UKHospitality Cymru said:

"This revised scheme further recognises the world class visitor experience the Hospitality industry delivers across the whole of Wales and a project that works towards the maintenance of these standards is to be welcomed, the emphasis being to better reflect the guest experience as opposed to the rigid, physical aspects of a business.

"Any Scheme that aims to provide more support for the industry to improve and develop is also to be welcomed as continued investment in our businesses is vital to attracting visitors and maintaining and building market share in the face of ever increasing competition in the UK and abroad."

Adrian Barsby, Wales Tourism Alliance Chair said:

"Given the seismic changes we have seen over the last ten years to the way our customers research and book their holidays or short breaks, we welcome this much awaited review and enhancement of the Quality Assurance scheme. Increased emphasis on the experience as opposed to the material facilities is in line with today's customer expectations. Whilst we all recognise the customer is increasingly relying on previous visitors reviews online, these do not give the same assurance as the expertise provided by a dedicated Visit Wales tourism professional. The QA scheme is there to provide that additional baseline re-assurance to the prospective customer that they are making the right choice. We look forward to the benefits it will undoubtedly bring."

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# £56m programme to strengthen Wales' flood and coastal defences

The Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management programme has been prioritised according to risk, considering factors such as the likelihood and impact of a flood, previous events, the number of properties to benefit and the wider benefits of the scheme.

For the construction phase alone, the schemes planned for 2018–19 are expected to benefit over 6,500 properties.

Local authorities and Natural Resources Wales will receive funding to deliver flood risk management schemes to protect people, properties and businesses. Many of the schemes will also deliver wider benefits including habitat improvements, recreational benefits and reducing risk to infrastructure.

The funding will be used to complete the construction of new and existing projects, as well as scoping and designing future schemes. The new programme was developed in collaboration with representatives from Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Welsh Local Government Association, local authorities, Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water and the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE).

Among the major new schemes to commence are:

- Machynys flood defences in Llanelli
- Leckwith in Cardiff
- Tidal works to the River Cadoxton
- Llansannan and Mochdre in Conwy
- Llanberis in Gwynedd
- Llanmaes in the Vale of Glamorgan
- Parc yr Onnen in Aberystwyth
- Llyn Tegid Reservoir works, Gwynedd

The Welsh Government also announced last week plans for a new Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre, to inform decisions on coastal adaptation and potential schemes on a national basis.

Over the life of this Assembly term, the Welsh Government plans to allocate £151 million of capital investment for NRW and local authorities' flood risk activities. Together with the Coastal Risk Management Programme, this results in a potential investment of over £263 million in flood and coastal schemes over the life of this Government.

The Minister said:

“Flooding can have a devastating impact on the lives of those affected. This funding of £56m further demonstrates our commitment to reduce risk and build resilience to flooding and coastal

erosion.

“We are investing in new schemes and major maintenance right across Wales. I have also protected NRW’s budget for flood risk management activities next financial year, as well as funding a new Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre which will improve our understanding of coastal processes and inform better decision making.

“I’m pleased to announce this ambitious programme, which will support communities and areas right across Wales who are most at risk from flooding and coastal erosion.”

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## **Finance Secretary visits Basque Country to explore the region’s innovations in tax policy and economic and infrastructure planning**

The Basque Government has a reputation for its innovative approach to progressive taxation, economic development and trade, social, transport and infrastructure planning including its minimum income scheme and investment in public transport infrastructure.

The Cabinet Secretary will meet Pedro Azpiazu, the Basque Minister for Treasury and Economy, Arantxa Tapia, the Minister for Economic Development and Competitiveness and Beatriz Artolazabal, Minister for Employment and Social Policies. He will also visit the Port of Bilbao and see the high-speed railway which serves the region.

Over the past decade Wales’ relationship with the Basque Country has steadily grown with joint activity between the regions at both government-level – through joint co-operation in European networks – and at an institutional level.

The Basque Government recently published its revised international strategy, Estrategia Basque Country 2018-20, which includes Wales as one of 5 priority regions for the Basque Country in Europe.

Professor Drakeford said:

“Wales and the Basque Country already enjoy, and benefit from, co-operation across a broad range of areas.

“With the introduction of our new taxes in April and our work to

develop new taxes, the visit provides a useful opportunity to share good practice and learn from the Basque Country's progressive ideas on tax policy and administration, social policies and its investment programmes to improve public services and infrastructure. It also provides an opportunity to discuss the region's strategic relationship with the Spanish Government in relation to budgetary matters.

"The visit to the high-speed railway will also help inform our planning for the South Wales Metro.

"We are keen to strengthen ties with the Basque Country and I look forward to exploring how we build on, and deepen, co-operation between our 2 regions."

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## Children to have access to epilepsy drug in Wales

Epilepsy is a disorder characterised by seizures which are due to abnormal electrical activity in the brain. Seizures can vary from the briefest lapses of attention or muscle jerks, to severe and prolonged convulsions such as violent and involuntary muscle contractions. Seizures can also vary in frequency, from less than one per year to several per day.

Children aged between 4 and 15 who have this condition will have access to lacosamide (Vimpat®) as adjunctive therapy in the treatment of partial-onset seizures, even if the partial seizure spreads across the brain.

In Wales, paediatric epilepsy is the most common neurological disorder, affecting about 0.7% of all children. Around 10-29 per cent of paediatric epilepsy patients find that currently available anti-epileptic drugs do not control their seizures sufficiently, highlighting the need for new treatment options.

A New Treatment Fund for Wales was announced by the Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething last year, making £80m available to speed up access to the very latest medicines recommended by the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and AMWSG.

Under the new system, all health boards in Wales are required to make a NICE or AMWSG recommended medicine available no later than two months from the date the guidance is published, shortening the maximum amount of time before which a health board must make a treatment available by a third.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“This is a great example of the New Treatment Fund working for epilepsy patients and their families in Wales. This can be a debilitating and distressing condition.

“The substantial investment that we have made in NHS Wales demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that patients receive the latest recommended treatments quickly, no matter where they live in Wales.

“I look forward to seeing the fund continuing to promptly deliver the latest, innovative medicines to patients who need them, making a real difference to their lives.”

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## **Bus grants to keep Wales moving**

Funding under the Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) is allocated annually to Wales’ local authorities by a formula that reflects their overall populations and their rural or urban characteristics.

The £25m grant will be shared between the 22 local authorities, and will allow each to subsidise socially-necessary bus and community transport within their areas.

The grant will supplement local authorities’ own expenditure on bus and community transport services.

Ken Skates said:

“I am pleased to announce that the Welsh Government has committed £25m to help ensure a sustainable bus service across Wales over the next financial year.

“Local scheduled bus services are, and will continue to be, the foundation of our public transport system, allowing people across Wales to get to work, hospital appointments, education and leisure activities.

“They are vital to Welsh life and actually account for around 100m passenger journeys each year.

“I am pleased we have been able to maintain our investment levels in Wales’ bus services despite increasingly challenging financial settlements.

“This is a reflection of our commitment to supporting our bus industry and to delivering an effective network of buses for

communities as part of an integrated, multi-modal system of public transport right across Wales.”