

Wales secures €90m of EU research funding to drive innovation

The Horizon 2020 Annual Report 2017, which was published last week, shows Welsh businesses have attracted more than €16m of funding and Wales continues to achieve a higher proportion of private sector participations than the rest of the UK.

Professor Drakeford said:

“Horizon 2020 provides real opportunities for businesses and organisations to be at the cutting edge of research and innovation.

“Our white paper Securing Wales Future and policy paper Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit emphasised the importance of Horizon 2020 to Wales and that it will continue to receive Welsh participation after Brexit.

“Horizon 2020 creates valued partnerships, which lead to direct economic benefits and has helped put Wales at the forefront of science and innovation.”

In the last year, Welsh organisations have won more than €30m of Horizon 2020 funding to drive forward ground-breaking projects with partners across Europe.

Cowbridge-based company Cymru Coal Ltd has benefited from Horizon 2020 funding, securing €1.3m to participate in the €7m IMP@CT project. It is part of a consortium led by the University of Exeter and involving organisations from France, Finland and Germany. Cymru Coal is sharing its significant expertise in mining and related machinery to create viable new methods of excavating small and complex deposits of metal.

Gareth Thomas, Cymru Coal’s managing director, said:

“We are delighted a small Welsh company is playing such a crucial part in providing the expertise needed to deliver a bespoke piece of equipment to the Horizon 2020 IMP@CT project. It’s rewarding to work as part of a team of partners with such varying areas of expertise.

“This project has enhanced our knowledge and understanding of hard rock mining. We are very appreciative of this opportunity and look forward to the potential benefits it can bring to Cymru Coal, the project partners and the countries of Europe and beyond.”

Business rates support for high streets extended

The scheme, which is unique to Wales, will provide additional support to around 13,000 small and medium-sized high street businesses across the country, including shops, restaurants, cafes, pubs and wine bars.

The Welsh Government-funded scheme, which was originally set up for 2017-18 only, will provide eligible businesses with a reduction of up to £750 from their non-domestic rates bills.

Professor Drakeford said:

“This additional support, which extends the high street rates relief scheme into 2018-19, together with our decision to put the £100m small business rates relief scheme on a permanent footing from April ensures ratepayers across Wales are receiving support to pay their bills.

“Targeting support to high street retailers will help those businesses, which are affected by the current economic conditions and competition from online and out-of-town providers.”

Almost £7.6m to revitalise town centres across Wales

The Minister will visit a boutique hotel and also a bunkhouse in the town to learn how these projects benefitted from the funding.

The Welsh Government's £20m Town Centre Loans Fund is helping to bring underused sites in town centres back to life. Once loans are repaid, the money is used again to fund new loans.

Caernarfon has benefitted from over £700,000 of Town Centre Loans, £250,00 of which has been used to help redevelop the Grade II listed building Tŷ Castell into a boutique hotel and restaurant. £60,000 was used to completely renovate a second property, Tŷ Glyndŵr, to create a bunkhouse, bar and café.

Rebecca Evans said:

“The Town Centre Loan Fund brings empty and derelict sites in town centres back into use. It supports activities that increase footfall on our high streets, tackle empty sites and help businesses to grow and prosper. Once loans are repaid, the money is used again to fund new loans.”

Projects to benefit from the £7.595m announced today include:

- In Gwynedd, a loan of £500,000 will be used to extend the regeneration programme in Caernarfon and Bangor town centres, and to also extend the regeneration work into Bethesda;
- In Rhondda Cynon Taf, £975,000 will be used to help redevelop buildings in Aberdare and Pontypridd town centres;
- and Swansea will benefit from £2,000,000 to regenerate sites across the city centre.

[Over £1.7m EU funding boost for Holyhead tourism sites](#)

The aim of the project is to transform Holy Island into an iconic destination, making the most of its strategic location as a gateway for international visitors to Wales and the UK.

The project will include improving the visitor welcome at Holyhead port and railway station highlighting what Holy Island, Anglesey and North Wales have to offer the visitor.

The plans also feature improvements to key sites on Holy Island including the iconic St Cybi’s Church and Roman fort site, and Holyhead Breakwater Park, including improved facilities and interpretation. Signage will also be provided to assist with connections between attractions.

The developments at Holyhead are part of the Welsh Government’s wider EU funded Tourism Attractor Destination programme, led by Visit Wales, which aims to create 11 must see destinations across Wales. The project is designed to address business investment and employment growth within the tourism sector in the regions, and put Wales on the world map as a holiday destination.

Ahead of a visit to St Cybi’s Church and Roman Fort site the First Minister said:

“Holyhead is the gateway to Wales and the UK for thousands of visitors every year. It has a rich history stretching back to roman and medieval times and has a wealth of natural attractions.

“This funding boost will improve and raise the profile of these attractions, encouraging visitors to spend more time in Holyhead. It will allow the town to make the most of its unique strategic location.

“This announcement is part of a wider programme of major investment in tourism to create a number of must-see attractions across Wales and is a vote of confidence in Holyhead and what it has to offer.”

Anglesey County Council Leader, Councillor Llinos Medi Huws said:

“We very much welcome this announcement of investment to improve and enhance Holy Island’s role as a key visitor gateway into Anglesey and other parts of North Wales. This package will help us to improve the visitor experience at key locations, helping to promote what the area has to offer, making sure that visitors are made aware that they are in Wales and giving them a flavour of Welsh culture and heritage. In this way we aim to see greater economic benefits from tourism to local businesses and communities.”

First Minister Carwyn Jones to meet Prime Minister for talks on EU Withdrawal Bill

The First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon will also attend the meeting. The Welsh Government have serious concerns about the UK government’s EU Withdrawal Bill, which, as currently drafted, allows the UK government to take control of devolved policy areas, such as farming and fishing, once the UK has left the EU.

The meeting follows the introduction to the National Assembly of the Welsh Government’s Continuity Bill as a fall back option which seeks to transfer EU Law in areas already devolved to Wales into Welsh law on the day the UK leaves the EU.

Carwyn Jones said:

“We are at a crucial stage in these talks. The UK government is moving in the right direction, but its latest offer, which has not been agreed with the devolved administrations, is insufficient, and we could not recommend the Assembly to give its legislative consent

to the Withdrawal Bill on the basis of the amendment they have proposed.

“We want to resolve this and are committed to continuing to try to seek agreement before the Bill finishes its passage through Parliament, but time is against us. That is why we will continue to progress our Continuity Bill through the National Assembly, but as we have said repeatedly, this is only a fall-back option

“Just last week at the JMC (EN) we and the Scottish Government put forward a number of ideas about how we could move forward from the UK government’s proposals and I look forward to discussing these with the Prime Minister.”