

Major employer in Bridgend to create 49 new jobs with help from Welsh Government

The investment will help the company as it competes on a global stage, by increasing production capability at the Pencoed plant.

Ortho is a global leader of in vitro diagnostics, supplying sophisticated technologies that test for a variety of diseases, conditions, and substances, and match blood to ensure that blood transfusion recipients receive appropriate and compatible blood. Ortho serves hospitals, blood banks and laboratories in more than 125 countries and territories.

Ortho has ramped up production significantly to keep up with increasing customer needs, particularly in China, and will add a further production line in 2018 with an option for another by 2020.

The Life Sciences Sector in Wales, of which Ortho is a key player, has some 350 companies that employ 11,000 people. The Welsh Government founded the Life Sciences Hub in 2014 to support the sector and encourage collaboration between universities, academics, private companies and investors.

Speaking ahead of a visit to the company, First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“Wales’ dynamic life sciences sector continues to go from strength to strength – and I am delighted to announce this funding which will help create nearly 50 new jobs.”

Paul Hales, Senior Director at Ortho, said:

“At Ortho, our purpose is to improve and save lives through diagnostics. A secure and consistent supply of high-quality product is at the core of that purpose, and we are delighted to be increasing our production capabilities to meet the ever rising demand for our products. We are grateful for the continuing support of the Welsh Government.”

Minister takes the high road for

woodland fact finding mission

The Minister and Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity visited a number of forestry sites, including a new woodland creation scheme at Westloch and the 'Sheep and Trees' scheme at Wakefield Farm. The Minister also received a tour of Forest Research where she was updated on their essential tree-related research work.

The Scottish Government has made it a statutory requirement to publish and maintain a forestry strategy and in 2016, the McKinnon review recommended streamlining the tree planting process and earlier engagement between tree-planting businesses and communities.

In 2017, a new "Sheep and Trees" partnership initiative was introduced, aimed at helping land managers to identify the many opportunities woodland creation can bring to support and develop their existing farm enterprises.

During a tour of the sites the Minister discussed these developments with Cabinet Secretary Ewing and Forestry Commission Scotland officials as part of her research aimed at advancing policies and initiatives to improve woodland cover in Wales.

The Welsh Government's [Woodlands for Wales Forestry Strategy](#) and accompanying 5-year action plan sets a target of 2,000 hectares of new planting per annum. Increasing woodland cover and developing a competitive and integrated forestry sector are key outcomes of the Strategy.

Hannah Blythyn said:

"Not enough trees are currently being planted in Wales. That is why I identified improving and expanding our woodlands as being amongst my top ministerial priorities. Our Woodlands for Wales Strategy is a long term vision for forestry in Wales and we need to back this up with innovative, effective action on the ground.

"It is important we in Wales are outward looking and seek to learn from other countries' successes. Whilst the land area available for afforestation is much larger in Scotland than Wales, the visit was an invaluable opportunity to examine the Scottish approach and the subsequent successful increase in woodland creation. I am grateful to Fergus Ewing, Forestry Commission Scotland and everyone I met for the warm welcome.

Rural Affairs Secretary Fergus Ewing said:

"I was delighted to welcome Ms Blythyn to Scotland. The visit was a valuable opportunity to share our experiences and strengthen our cross-border collaboration.

“Scotland’s forestry industry is a real success story contributing £1 billion to the country’s economy and supporting 25,000 jobs. Woodland creation is very much at the heart of this success and I have introduced a number of new measures to drive this forward. By working hand in hand with the industry and other land managers, we are now starting to see a welcome increase in tree planting activity across Scotland.

“I hope we can continue to share experiences and learn from each other as we work to deliver our common goal of planting and growing more trees for the benefit of everyone on these islands.”

Welsh Government funded Modular Theatre at Llandough Hospital now open

The new specifically designed unit, which opened on 29th November 2017, will be key to helping Cardiff and Vale University Health Board reduce waiting times within orthopaedic services.

Two theatres utilised by Cardiff and Vale Orthopaedic Centre have recently been taken out of commission. In a typical week, these theatres would have seen approximately 55 orthopaedic patients; which meant their closure would have had a significant impact on waiting times.

This new temporary modular theatre is the first stage in the process of addressing the issue while a more permanent solution is planned to replace the two original theatres.

It is estimated that between January 2018 and April 2018 the number of patients that will be treated within the new temporary modular theatre will be between 100 and 130.

The use of the modular theatre means less pressure on the health board in terms of outsourcing requirements and ensures improvements in treatment and patient outcomes. In addition, the quality of services at the site in Llandough will be enhanced to recognised standards, benefitting patients and health professionals alike.

The Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said;

“I am pleased the modular theatre has opened at the Llandough site, following Welsh Government funding. It will alleviate pressure on the health board, allowing healthcare professionals to do their job effectively, safely and to a high standard.

“I’m confident that this is the best way forward in terms of value for money for a temporary solution. It will benefit the people of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, and will help to bridge the gap while a more permanent structure is put in place.”

Chief Executive of Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, Len Richards said;

“We are delighted that Welsh Government has supported our surgical teams in commissioning a new modular theatre at our Cardiff and Vale Orthopaedic Centre at the University Hospital Llandough site. This new theatre means the Health Board can effectively support treatment of patients across Cardiff and Vale that require orthopaedic surgery to improve their health and quality of life.”

Welsh students applying for university will benefit from most generous student support package in the UK

The first of its kind in the UK, it will support students when they most need it, recognising that costs such as accommodation are the main barrier for those making the choice about whether to go to university.

The new student finance package launched by the Welsh Government is the most generous in the UK and is designed to give more help towards living costs by providing the equivalent to the National Living Wage through a mix of non-repayable grants and loans. This means students can focus on their studies rather than worry about making ends meet.

With National Student Money Week approaching (12-16 February), the Welsh Government has launched an awareness campaign to promote the benefits of university with the help of more financial support available. The campaign features “Money Monster”- a personification of money. The character’s sole purpose is to stop students getting to university, and if they do, to disrupt their student life adding unnecessary pressure.

A key element of the new student finance package is that it offers a stronger package of support for students who want to study part-time, ensuring that undergraduate full-time and part-time students have the same opportunities. Wales will be the first county in Europe to provide equivalent living costs support – in grants and loans – to full-time and part-time undergraduates, as well as post-graduates.

This has been done to encourage students from all backgrounds to enter higher education, whether they're in full-time work, raising a family or have caring responsibilities. Part-time students will receive equivalent support on a pro-rata basis.

The latest National Income and Expenditure Survey* shows that more than one third of Welsh- domiciled students have overdrafts, nearly one fifth have commercial credit and one tenth are in arrears.

The new student finance package for 2018/19 undergraduate entrants addresses these issues by easing financial barriers for students, meaning that full-time and part-time students have enough money to meet their day to day living costs while studying.

Every eligible student can claim a minimum grant of £1,000 they will not have to pay back, regardless of their household income. This is part of an overall mix of grants and loans for living costs equivalent to receiving that National Living Wage, available to every eligible student while they study.

Grants will be means-tested to support those who need them most. Students from homes with lower household income will receive the highest grant – up to £10,124 in London and £8,100 in the rest of the UK. This is in addition to the £1,000 minimum grant. It is likely that around a third of full-time students will be eligible for the full grant. Students who receive a smaller grant can access a loan to top up the amount they receive equivalent to the National Living Wage level.

The average household income for a dependent student in the current system is around £25,000. Under the new system such a student will receive around £7,000 a year in a grant they won't need to pay back.

The new financial support package for Welsh students was designed following recommendations of a higher education funding review led by Professor Sir Ian Diamond. Living costs were found to be the main barrier for those making the choice about whether to go to university.

The latest figures from Welsh Government show that students in Wales spent 46% of their student income on their course and 37% on living. Housing came in at 18%.

Wales's Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams said:

“Money is clearly a very important factor when deciding when to go to university, and for those who are already studying, money is found to be a major cause for stress.

“With this in mind, we have designed a new package of support to alleviate these concerns that both parents and students share. This will allow students to focus on their studies without having to worry about how they are going to afford their day to day living costs.

“The support that Welsh students, studying anywhere in the UK, can apply for is now equivalent to the National Living Wage. In addition, most students will have no upfront costs to pay as a tuition fee loan can be taken out to cover their course.

“It is important to remember that student loans are only repayable when borrowers’ earn more than £25,000 per year. Repayments can start from as little as £30 a month.

“Living costs must not be a barrier to going to university. I want everyone who has the talent, potential and ambition to have that opportunity. Whether it’s studying full-time or combining it with your career and studying part-time, university should be an option for everyone, no matter what your background or income.”

The TV adverts will appear on ITV Wales, S4C, Sky Regional, ITV Player and All4 from 5 February.

For more information, visit gov.wales/studentmoney

£30m for vital local road improvements

This vital new investment in local roads, being delivered through funding to all the local authorities, will help address problem areas and prevent deterioration of the network.

Alun Davies said,

“In my discussions with local government since taking up post, they have been clear with me about the pressures on the road network, and how in some parts of Wales, the state of local roads is simply not up to a safe standard.

“I am really pleased to be able to make this funding available to support a comprehensive refurbishment programme and improve future resilience of the local authority roads network.”

Councillor Andrew Morgan, WLGA Spokesperson for Transport said:

“We are grateful to Welsh Government for listening to our calls for further funding to maintain the highway network. Residents, businesses and tourists across Wales rely on our roads on a daily basis and so it is vital to ensure that they are in a good condition. We welcome this funding as councils get to work on

implementing highway asset management plans.”

Councillor Anthony Hunt, WLGA Spokesperson for Finance and Resources said:

“This funding will lift some of the pressures faced by councils in maintaining and improving road conditions in their areas. We are pleased that constructive and open dialogue with Welsh Government has yielded this investment, and we look forward to continue to have constructive and open dialogue to find sustainable responses to financial challenges faced by local government.”

The £30m is a one-off investment that will be based on an established highway allocation formula.

The fund was originally announced as part of the final Budget 2018-19, which set out a series of new revenue allocations for Wales as a result of funding consequential received from the UK Autumn Budget.