

Sabbatical scheme contributing to one million Welsh speakers

Launched in 2005, the scheme aims to increase the number of bilingual teachers and teaching assistants in Wales £3.13m was announced last year to support the expansion of the Welsh language Sabbatical Scheme in line with the recently launched Welsh in Education plan which outlines the role education will play in achieving the one million target.

The minister sat in on part of a teaching session and met teachers taking part in the year-long course, aimed at teachers in English-medium primary schools to help them significantly develop their Welsh-language skills.

Other courses available include 25 day and 5 week immersion courses, again aimed at those in English-medium primary schools and a range of part-time courses to practitioners working in Welsh-medium schools or teaching Welsh as a subject in English-medium secondary schools.

The Minister said:

“Education is vital if we are to reach one million speakers, both in terms of increasing the number of Welsh medium schools and in improving and increasing the teaching of Welsh in English medium schools. The sabbatical scheme plays a very important role in this by improving the ability of teachers already in the system to help meet the increased demand.

“It was very interesting to watch some of the session and to speak with the participants, in Welsh, to learn about their experiences on the course and their plans to implement strategies to raise standards in Welsh on return to their schools. I thank them for their commitment to the language and I hope this course gives them the confidence to make a difference once they’re back in the classroom.”

Dr Lowri Lloyd, Director of the University’s Welsh Language Services Centre said:

“It was a pleasure to welcome the Minister to the university to see the course in action. It’s an investment which shows the Welsh Government is serious about reaching one million Welsh speakers by 2050 and contributes directly towards implementing the new curriculum. It was also an opportunity and a privilege for the teachers to show the Minister the progress they have made so far.”

Food for thought at food and drink showcase

During his visit to the event, which was organised by Visit Wales and Food and Drink Wales, the Minister noted that Food and Tourism are particularly important in Wales as the two sectors are key components of the Welsh economy and that Prosperity for All: the new economic action plan, identifies food and tourism as new foundation sectors of the economy and as the backbones of many local economies.

Lord Elis Thomas, said:

“Welsh food and drink are an essential part of the tourism offer in Wales and give the tourism and hospitality industry an opportunity to provide visitors with a real sense of place. Food Tourism provides a means of drawing together the strengths of a local destination by building the relationships between the hospitality/catering industry and local food and drink producers.

“Visitors are looking for quality, local food and drink and they want to know the provenance of what is on the menu, whether they are eating in a café, restaurant, B&B or hotel. We want to shout about our produce with confidence and tell the story of its journey to our plates – we want visitors to enjoy a real taste of Wales and we want them to think of fantastic food and drink when they think of Wales.”

With 2018 being Year of the Sea in Wales the showcase included a feature on seafood and sea themed products in order to give tourism businesses ideas of how to incorporate the themed year through their food offering in 2018.

The aim of the event was to bring together producers and tourism and hospitality businesses to encourage more businesses to use Welsh produce in their food tourism offer.

David Evans, Director of Dylan's said

“We were delighted to host the Food and Drink Event at our Criccieth Restaurant earlier this week. All our staff thoroughly enjoyed looking after the 150 plus guests on the day and we were hugely impressed by the variety and quality of Welsh produce on display. As ever Dylan's is committed to promoting the very best of North Wales food and drink and Wales' Year of the Sea gives us a great opportunity to shout about local seafood and sea themed

products”.

Wales leading on organ donation consent rates

The latest Organ Donation and Transplantation statistics reveal a 72% consent rate and approximately 24.3 donors per million population (pmp), putting Wales at the top of the list.

Statistics also show that 39% of the Welsh population have registered to opt-in to donate their organs following their death.

For the first three quarters during 2017-18, there were 55 deceased organ donors, 16 more donors than the same period the previous year.

On 1 December 2015, Wales was the first country in the UK to move to a soft opt-out system of consent to organ donation. This means that if a person has not registered a decision to become an organ donor (opted in) or a decision not to become an organ donor (opted out), they will be considered as having no objection to being an organ donor – this is known as deemed consent. However, if individuals don't tell their family of their decision to donate, the family may not honour that decision and over-ride the organ donor registration or not support deemed consent.

The figures also demonstrate a decrease in the number of transplants compared to the corresponding timeframe for 2016/17; this was mainly due to fewer living transplants taking place. However, fewer people died whilst on the transplant waiting list at the end of the third quarter of 2017/18 in comparison to the previous year.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said;

These latest figures show promise, and I'm proud that Wales is leading the way in giving the gift of life to others.

There are significant steps being made, however small they are, and it is important to remember that this is a marathon, not a sprint.

However, while there are people dying waiting for their transplant, we must work harder to further increase the consent rate in order to have a significant impact on reducing transplant waiting lists.

Our latest campaign highlighted the importance of having a chat with your families and loved ones about organ donation, and I'd like to reiterate that message by encouraging everyone across Wales

to talk to their loved ones about their organ donation decision to ensure they will honour it.

Simply having a chat can help benefit the people of Wales and the UK by reducing the number of people dying whilst waiting for a suitable organ to become available, and transforming the lives of others.

You can register a decision at any time by calling 0300 123 23 23 (Calls to this phone line will be answered by NHS Blood and Transplant) or visiting www.organdonationwales.org or by telling your family (and friends).

[Reopening of Ebbw Vale line highly successful, new report finds](#)

Peter Brett Associates, in partnership with Beaufort Research and Loxley Consultancy has undertaken a final evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund funded Valleys Rail Strengthening (VRS) Project.

The VRS was principally a Welsh Government initiative intended to support enhanced services on key rail corridors (most notably Ebbw Vale) linking the Valleys with Cardiff. The total project cost was £22,674,978, including £8,478,945 European Regional Development Fund grant monies. The project ran from 1st April 2008 to 30th April 2011.

The evaluation consisted of two distinct strands and considered both the new services on the reopened Ebbw Vale Line in February 2008 between Ebbw Vale Parkway and Cardiff Central, and the provision of additional rolling stock to provide strengthened services at peak times on the; Merthyr Tydfil to Aberdare, Bridgend to Barry Island, Treherbert to Cardiff Central and Rhymney to Cardiff Central lines.

The Ebbw Vale line was reopened in order to reduce the level of car usage – particularly single occupancy commuting – improve access to employment opportunities and key services and reduce harmful greenhouse gas emission levels on roads by providing enhanced rail services during peak travel times.

The main findings of the report show the VRS has:

- delivered a 19% increase in capacity on the Valleys rail network
- increased travel-to-work by rail on strengthened lines by 88% between 2001 and 2011
- removed around 14 million road kilometres annually
- improved local air quality
- generated around £1 million of gross economic benefits per annum
- transformed access to the jobs market, and

- facilitated new housing developments in Ebbw Vale and Rogerstone

Economy and Transport Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“I was very pleased to note this report found that our funding to reopen the Ebbw Vale Line has provided a significant boost to the economy of Ebbw Vale. The report justifies the significant investment that has been made by Welsh Government in the area over many years and provides an important example of how devolution has positively shaped the local community and its economy.

“The report concludes that this is exactly the type of project which should be developed under the Metro concept and a best practice example of where targeted government investment in infrastructure can support wider economic development and regeneration.

“No transport project is undertaken for its own sake – it is always a means to enabling and facilitating a wider package of policy initiatives through improving access to markets. The strong peak in rail passenger growth across South-East Wales would have been unlikely without the introduction of better service.

“As set out last week, we want a transport network that prioritises people and businesses – a truly resilient and modern system for the benefit of the people of Wales.”

[Funding boost for Cwmcarn Forest](#)

This project has received funding from Caerphilly County Borough Council and through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

The funding, from the Welsh Government Tourist Amenity Investment Support (TAIS) scheme to the tune of £128,000 with an additional £32,000 coming from Caerphilly County Borough Council, will enable the ever-popular visitor attraction to enhance its visitor offer, through developing more family focused activities and enhancing existing facilities.

The funding will allow for a number of improvements at the attraction including:

- Expansion of bike trails – a popular destination for mountain bikers across Wales and beyond, the funding will provide up to an additional 3km of new trail to the existing network;

- Enhancing existing walking trails – upgrades and improvements to the existing footpath network, to include new directional signage throughout the site, including new way-marking and interpretation at key locations and points of interest;
- Creating a new welcome and arrival zone at the entrance to the site – including feature dry-stone walling, new flooring, signage, interpretation and artwork, as well as new planting of natural species of trees and flowers in the welcome zone.

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with responsibility for tourist attractions, Cllr Sean Morgan said:

“Cwmcarn Forest remains one of the county borough’s premier tourism venues, attracting walkers and mountain bikers from across Wales and even further beyond. This substantial grant funding will hugely benefit the attraction, allowing us to enhance the offering for visitors for many years to come.”

Tourism Minister, Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

“The Tourism Amenity Investment Support scheme is an excellent way for us to assist the tourism sector to make the improvements to the local facilities and amenities. Visitors expect the best quality in all aspects of their visit from the accommodation through to information provision, toilets and parking. This is an opportunity for us to help the industry get the building blocks right. I’m delighted that the funding is enabling a number of improvements to take place at this popular attraction and have been delighted to see exciting plans for development today.”

The project is also key to the development of a Valleys Landscape Park, and is a model which Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services and chair of the Valleys Taskforce, Alun Davies said he is keen to see replicated in other areas.

He said:

“I am determined we unlock the true potential of the South Wales Valleys, and can do so by harnessing the power of our natural landscape. Our proposals for a Valleys Landscape Park aim to do just that, and will help link these fabulous new facilities at Cwmcarn Forest with other attractions in the area and draw in more visitors to this beautiful area.”