

# Next steps to further extend fast broadband in Wales

Since Superfast Cymru began in 2013, the availability of superfast broadband across Wales has more than doubled thanks directly to this project and investment

The latest Ofcom report (December 2017) shows that Wales now has the highest availability of superfast broadband over 30Mbps amongst the devolved nations despite the challenges of the country's topography.

A thorough testing and verification process is currently under way on the latest data presented by Openreach with the aim of announcing the project's final figures in the spring.

The new measures, backed by funding of £80m, include a new rollout scheme currently out to tender which encourages rural delivery, business prioritisation and ultrafast 100Mbps services.

Under the scheme solutions will be encouraged in areas suffering the lowest download speeds along with lower 4G mobile data coverage. It will include safeguards to ensure communities are kept up to date as far as possible on whether they will be included.

Also included in the new measures are a review and continuation of the current voucher schemes for those without access to superfast broadband and ongoing work to develop a parallel community focussed scheme. A dedicated broadband outreach team will work with clusters of homes or businesses to procure a solution.

Finally, Openreach will also work an additional two months under the current agreement to connect 2,500 premises at no extra cost to the Welsh Government.

In addition, Openreach has been invited to provide details of structures built but not completed, and the Welsh Government will look at how these can be completed under the existing grant agreement.

Julie James said:

“Through Superfast Cymru we have fundamentally altered the broadband landscape in Wales, bringing superfast broadband to areas of Wales that simply would not have been connected.

“We must not lose sight of the significant achievement that this large scale engineering project represents. Homes and businesses the length and breadth of Wales are now enjoying the benefits of this investment and accessing digital services.

“Despite the success of Superfast Cymru in transforming broadband connectivity across Wales, there is clearly more work to be done and this Government is committed to taking further action.

“The suite of measures I am announcing today, when taken together, will help us to realise the ambition described in Taking Wales Forward to bring people together digitally by offering fast reliable broadband to every property in Wales.

“Together, the successor scheme, the community scheme and our voucher schemes will provide a comprehensive package of interventions that will help us meet the challenges ahead.”

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## [Finance Secretary encouraged by discussions with peers as Brexit Bill enters 2nd reading in House of Lords](#)

Professor Drakeford visited the House of Lords on Monday (29 January) to brief peers on his concerns with the EU Withdrawal Bill along with Scottish Brexit Secretary Mike Russell, Lord Jim Wallace, the former Deputy First Minister of Scotland, Welsh Government officials and former diplomat Sir Emyr Jones Parry.

The Finance Secretary presented his concerns to peers about clause 11 and other aspects of the bill which, as it currently stands, will mean powers in areas which are devolved to the National Assembly will have new restrictions placed on them once we leave the EU.

The Welsh and Scottish governments published amendments to the bill in September but these were defeated in the House of Commons as a result of the UK government opposition to them. Despite undertakings to do so, the government has not yet brought forward its own amendments to address the concerns about clause 11 and other aspects of the bill. The Welsh and Scottish Governments are therefore urging the House of Lords to consider supporting similar amendments, if the UK government does not bring forward its own amendments which are agreed with the Devolved Administrations.

Ever since the EU Withdrawal Bill, was published, the Welsh Government has resisted its power grab in devolved areas. Working with Scottish counterparts and peers from both sides of the House of Lords, efforts will be redoubled to bring about the necessary substantial change to it.

Mark Drakeford said:

“I am encouraged by the fantastic turnout and strong support from peers yesterday. I will work hard with peers from all sides of the House to ensure they have the briefing and information necessary to

address this issue. What we now need is that the UK Government will come up with a satisfactory amendment early enough to mean a fight is not necessary. Be in no doubt, however, that if such an amendment is not produced, we will do everything we can to defeat this aspect of the bill and to bring about the changes which protect the devolution settlement across the UK.”

A vote upon the inclusion of amendments to the EU Withdrawal Bill will take place later in February.

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## **£1.4m EU boost for new aquaculture project**

The £2m Smartaqua project will see scientists from Swansea University’s Centre for Sustainable Aquatic Research (CSAR) work with Welsh businesses to use advanced technology and develop ground-breaking new products and services for the specialised aquaculture market.

Professor Drakeford said:

“This scheme will drive forward scientific research to help businesses further develop aquaculture industry in Wales.

“This is a specialised sector with the potential to provide significant economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas.”

Over the next four years, the project will focus on methods for cleaner fish production; fish for biomedical research and the aquarium trade and develop locally-sourced and more environmentally-friendly aquafeeds and nutraceuticals.

The project aims to register new patents, help businesses to create jobs and expand the industry in Wales. Businesses in North Wales, South West Wales and the South Wales Valleys are set to benefit.

Professor Carlos Garcia de Leaniz, from CSAR, said:

“We are delighted to receive EU funding for this exciting venture, which will enable us to work with industry to develop existing and new products and technologies; bring them to market, and in turn, generate much-needed employment opportunities, particularly for

businesses in rural communities.”

CSAR is Wales’ only centre of excellence for sustainable aquaculture and is the UK’s leading centre on recirculation technology and non-food aquaculture. It was established in 2003 with backing from the Welsh Government, EU funds and Swansea University.

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## **Education Secretary announces package of support for home educating families**

Support for home educators will include help with exam registrations, the same health offers made to children in school, access to Wales’ digital learning platform Hwb, exploring opportunities for home-educating families to learn Welsh and support from Careers Wales.

The Education Secretary has also announced that she intends to consult on using existing legislation to require local authorities to establish a database to assist them in identifying children not on a school register, not in education otherwise than at school and not receiving a suitable education. At the same time the Cabinet Secretary will consult on statutory guidance setting out the arrangements for the operation of the database and how it will be managed.

The consultation will consider which partners will be able to contribute to providing the most complete database, such as local health boards, and whether independent schools should be required to tell local authorities about the pupils who attend those schools.

The above powers could not be used to compel a parent to register that their child is being home-educated. However, the powers would enable the local authority to compile a reasonably complete database of children not on any local authority education or independent school register.

The statutory guidance will outline the arrangements local authorities will be expected to put in place to identify home-educated children, and to assess the suitability of education.

In order to be able to make an assessment the education is suitable, it would not be unreasonable for the local authority to see the child. This will be for the local authority to decide and will be influenced by a number of factors including the context and circumstances surrounding each individual child.

The statutory guidance will provide clear advice to local authorities on this matter.

The Education Secretary will announce further details to the National Assembly for Wales in a statement this afternoon.

Announcing the plans today, Kirsty Williams said:

“I fully respect the choice of parents to home educate their children and nothing I am considering or proposing changes that. There are many valid, different and sometimes complex reasons why parents would choose to go down this route and in some cases this will be the best choice for the child.

“But this choice must be balanced with the right of children to receive a suitable education. Local authorities, by establishing a database supported by statutory guidance, will be able to assess whether a child is receiving a suitable education and, if they are educated at home, that home educators have the support they need.

“I know that home-educating families in Wales have previously had limited and varied levels of support from local authorities, and no support from the Welsh Government. I want that to change.

“That’s why we’re developing a package of educational support that includes making Hwb available to home-educated children, help with exam registrations, and exploring options for home-educating families to learn Welsh and a clear offer of support from Careers Wales.

“Balancing the right of the child to receive a suitable education with the choice of parents to home-educate is always going to be a challenge, but I believe the plans we will consult on represent a sensible and proportionate way forward.”

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## **A grate result – Wales’ iconic Caerphilly cheese gains European protection**

From today ‘Traditional Welsh Caerphilly/Traditional Welsh Caerffili’ is protected by the European Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status, one of three special European Protected Food Name (PFN) designations.

Under the EU’s protected food name scheme certain food and drink products receive Europe-wide legal protection against imitation, misuse and fraud.

‘Traditional Welsh Caerphilly /Traditional Welsh Caerffili’ is Wales’s first

cheese to attain PFN status and joins a family of 15 Welsh PFN products.

The application for PGI status was made to the European Commission on behalf of Traditional Welsh Caerphilly Cheesemakers in Wales, led by Carwyn Adams from Caws Cenarth.

'Traditional Welsh Caerphilly/Traditional Welsh Caerffilli' is Wales's only native cheese. Gwynfor and Thelma Adams from Caws Cenarth first made this cheese in 1987 when they started making cheese as a direct result of milk quotas. Today, 30 years later, their Traditional Welsh Caerffili is made with the same original recipe and has been named after Thelma, as Thelma's Original.

Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

"I was delighted to visit Caws Cenarth recently and, having sampled their Traditional Welsh Caerphilly Cheese, I can confirm this is indeed a product worthy of recognition. I am pleased the Welsh Government was able to support Caws Cenarth, on behalf of all Traditional Welsh Caerphilly cheesemakers, with this application.

"We are proud we now have fifteen Welsh food and drink products that have been awarded PFN status. This is testament to the high quality and unique nature of our produce."

Carwyn Adams from Caws Cenarth said:

"Great care is taken at every step of the recipe. From the careful hand cutting of the curds to the individual hand moulding of the cheese. We are really excited to be able to protect the "Traditional Welsh Caerphilly/Traditional Welsh Caerffili" name. It's a guarantee of its quality and authenticity, and the skill and passion involved in the making."

The Welsh Government funds support to all Welsh producers wanting to attain PFN status, this support is currently delivered by ADAS.