

Something to toast to: Welsh Food and Drinks sector edges nearer to meeting 2020 target early

Speaking during plenary, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths said the industry is thriving and stands on the edge of meeting the target of £7bn turnover by 2020.

The Cabinet Secretary also spoke of the challenges and opportunities Brexit presents and outlined how the Welsh Government is working with the sector to overcome these.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“Our Welsh food and drink industry continues to go from strength to strength. With the industry’s sales turnover increasing from £6.1bn to £6.9bn, we stand on the threshold of reaching our Food and Drink Action Plan target of £7bn by 2020 early.

“This is tremendous progress and we’ve seen great success since the Plan was published in 2014. It reflects the hard work and significant progress by businesses across Wales, large and small.

“The interest in our wonderful Welsh food and drink has never been greater. The quality, service and originality of the Welsh offer are recognised across the World.

“Wales’ food and drink industry is a huge asset. It contributes increasingly to our economy, creating jobs and careers where skills matter. It adds value to our agricultural produce and it brings prestige to our nation with a growing profile and reputation throughout the World. Wales has a winner.

“However, we cannot ignore the challenges and uncertainty Brexit presents. To maintain the momentum we have achieved to date, we must embrace change and seek any opportunities that arise.

“Through continued focus on building on what works, and through a readiness for Brexit, we will be fully ‘fit for market’ with industry well placed for optimal performance. I have every confidence we will continue to succeed and make the best of Brexit and deliver for Wales.”

New fund delivering life changing drugs faster than ever before

On the first anniversary of the flagship scheme, the First Minister revealed the average time for recommended new medicines to be made available was now only 10 days, way ahead of the 60 day deadline.

During a visit to Llandough Hospital, the First Minister met patients who have benefited from receiving Migalastat, a new medicine to treat Fabry disease, a serious and progressive condition that causes severe pain and can greatly affect people's quality of life. Migalastat allows people with Fabry disease freedom from the frequent hospital visits required with the previous treatment options, enabling them to live a more normal life.

The First Minister said:

"The New Treatment Fund is one of our flagship projects and a key Welsh Government commitment. We are investing £80m over 5 years to ensure patients with life-threatening conditions can get much faster access to the latest medicines. Reaching and far exceeding our 60 day target is a great achievement and is making a very real difference to people's lives.

"This significant investment has removed uncertainties over funding and will ensure NHS Wales is in the best position to provide the latest recommended medicines. Many of these provide a significant step forward in the treatment of diseases that, until now, have had few or no treatment options. It is clear from the patients I have spoken to today that this fund is helping to transform lives."

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething, said:

"I am delighted with the progress achieved in the first year of the New Treatment Fund. Patients can now access 82 new medicines, much more quickly than they would have, had the fund not been in place. These include medicines to treat Crohn's disease, uveitis, cystic fibrosis, psoriasis, asthma, osteoporosis and Gauchers disease. More than 20 new medicines have been made available to treat a wide range of cancers including cancers of the breast, head and neck, lung, colon, thyroid gland and pancreas.

"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."

Cabinet Secretary announces £6m initiative to help develop next generation of farmers

The Young People into Agriculture Scheme will offer financial support to high achieving individuals looking to establish a new business or to develop an existing business. Successful applicants will need to demonstrate they have the attributes to lead dynamic businesses and drive change in the wider industry.

The £6m scheme, made available as part of the Budget agreement with Plaid Cymru, will develop participants' leadership skills. They will be encouraged to deploy these skills and impart their experience and knowledge within the industry.

To complement this scheme, a Young People in Agriculture Forum is being proposed. Forum members will work with Welsh Government to develop policies that benefit agricultural families, businesses and rural Wales.

The Forum will provide young people with an opportunity to express their views confidently and directly to Ministers, senior officials and industry bodies with a view to supporting the next generation into agriculture.

An important element of this initiative is around the development of future leaders. Members of the Forum will be expected to work with a mentor to develop a Personal Development Plan to support their training and development needs.

Launching the initiative during the FUW Farmhouse Breakfast and speaking subsequently to Farming Connect's Agri-Academy Rural Leadership students for 2017 the Cabinet Secretary said:

"I am consistently impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication of young people in Welsh agriculture. It has been one of my key priorities to support our next generation of farmers and I have spoken to many young people to gain a better understanding of what support they need to enter the industry and develop sustainable and resilient businesses.

"We need to be prepared for the challenges as we transition from the EU. The impact on our farmers is likely to be greater than for many other sectors. We must do all we can to build resilience and ensure we create an environment where business can prosper and individuals develop to become leaders of the industry. The two initiatives I am announcing today will give opportunities to young

people to develop themselves and their businesses in preparation for a world outside the EU.

“Both initiatives will sit alongside wider Welsh Government support for both young and other new entrants such as Farming Connect and the Farm Business Grant. Whilst there are many challenges for agriculture in Wales, I remain confident there are opportunities to develop a profitable and resilient industry that will benefit Wales’ future generations.”

Gold Award list of accommodation announced

The annual list recognises accommodation business offering the highest standards of quality, exceptional comfort and hospitality. For 2018 there are 40 Hotels and 87 Guest Accommodation made it to this prestigious listing. The Tourism Minister, Lord Elis-Thomas, visited Celtic Manor Resort today on a series of visits in south east Wales. The Celtic Manor Resort has been listed for the 6th time as one of the Gold Award Hotels with the Resort’s Manor House being listed for the 1st time.

Following refurbishment in 2017, Plas yn Dre, Bala has also been listed as a Gold Award Guest Accommodation for the first time this year. Plas yn Dre has been a family run restaurant since 1990 but had a transformation in 2017 with a complete re-vamp and the addition of 9 Guest Bedrooms, with support of £72,000 from the Tourism Investment Support Scheme.

Rachel Jones, Plas yn Dre, said:

“We are delighted here in Plas y Dre that all the hard work and dedication shown by all our team has paid off in us being given the Gold Award, and we’re proud to have made it to the Gold Award list for the first time.”

Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

“Quality and innovation are of the utmost importance in developing world class facilities which ensure that Wales remains a strong contender in a fiercely competitive global industry.

Being recognised as one of the Gold Award Hotels shows the commitment of these businesses to quality, delivering first class experience and going over and above our visitors’ expectations.”

Ian Edwards, CEO of Celtic Manor Resort, said:

“We are delighted to receive this Gold Award once again for the Celtic Manor Resort and we are particularly pleased that the Manor House has also achieved this prestigious listing for the first time. We are constantly striving to exceed our guests’ expectations and have recently completed a bedroom refurbishment to further improve the quality of our accommodation.

The opening of ICC Wales next year will bring an influx of discerning business travellers and visitors from all over the world so it is important all hotels and accommodation providers seek to achieve the highest standards like those set out in the Gold Award.”

[First Minister appoints new Chief Scientific Adviser for Wales](#)

As Wales’ chief scientific adviser, Professor Halligan will provide independent scientific advice to the First Minister and lead the development of the Welsh Government’s science policy. He will also work to promote the study of science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine to help build a strong science base in Wales.

Professor Halligan, who has secured international recognition for his research, has played a key role in a number of innovative developments including establishing the Cardiff University Brain Research Imaging Centre (CUBRIC), the Wales Research and Diagnostic Positron Emission Tomography Imaging Centre (PETIC), the Wales Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience (WICN), the Haydn Ellis Distinguished Lecture Series and Cardiff University Research Institutes.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“Professor Peter Halligan is an excellent scientist and world renowned psychologist and neuroscientist, whose research is internationally renowned and respected. His appointment is a huge boost to Wales’ growing science and research sector.”

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, said,

“I look forward to working with Professor Halligan to increase and

promote the excellent research conducted across Wales.

“The role of science and research in the Welsh economy is of growing importance and I am confident Professor Halligan will help us towards our ambition of create an innovative and ambitious science base in Wales.”

Professor Halligan said:

“I very much look forward to taking up this important role, and working with the scientific community to ensure research evidence is taken into account as part of the Government policy making process. I also hope to continue to build on the progress of my predecessors in growing Wales’s research and innovation capacity, to help raise Wales’s profile and grow its economic capability.”