

Welsh Government expands overseas operations to boost trade post-Brexit

The Welsh Government will open offices in Canada, France, Germany and Qatar next year to help protect existing markets, pursue new trade and investment opportunities and promote Wales to the world.

Germany and France are Wales' 2 biggest European markets in terms of trade and investment. A quarter of all Welsh exports go to Germany, worth £2.9bn last year alone, while 90 German companies are based in Wales employing over 12,000 people.

France is Wales' second biggest export destination, with the value of Welsh exports to France standing at £1.9bn in 2016. In addition, there are an estimated 80 French-owned companies in Wales employing over 8,100 people.

For the year ending June 2017, Canada was the 9th largest market for Welsh exports with a value of £392m, an increase of almost 70% over the previous 12 months. Canada is also in Wales' top 5 investing markets, with companies such as Montreal-headquartered CGI having offices in Wales.

The Middle East is a growing commercial market which has seen strong growth as an export destination for Welsh companies. Last year, Qatar was the 15th largest market for Welsh exports, worth £172m to the Welsh economy, which is an increase of over 15% on the previous year.

Wales has achieved record-breaking inward investment results for 3 years running, attracting major companies – including GE Aviation and General Dynamics – against the backdrop of Brexit and competition from the largest economies in the world.

Welsh Government overseas teams promote Wales as a potential investment destination and have helped secure some Wales' largest foreign investments.

For Welsh exporters, Welsh Government's overseas teams play a role in investment decisions, providing knowledge of markets and trends, business climate and culture as well as ways to win new business. Overseas teams also offer access to networks and businesses and facilitate connections with influencers and decision makers.

During a major speech this evening at Cardiff Met University on Wales after Brexit, the First Minister will say:

“Increasing our presence in these key markets allows us to pursue new trade and investment opportunities, build networks and promote Wales to the world. This has never been more important as we face a future outside of the European Union.

“Leaving the EU will create challenges, as well as opportunities.

That is why we are expanding our presence in Europe and across the globe, so we are able to meet with, and attract, new investors and sell Welsh goods to overseas customers.

“As well as identifying new and exciting opportunities, we are working hard to protect our existing markets. Two thirds of Welsh exports go to European countries, while a third of all Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) comes from the EU.

“If we turn our backs on the Single Market and shut ourselves off from vital European trading markets, it would be hugely damaging to our economy. Maintaining and increasing investment from companies already in Wales is vitally important to us and dedicated resource in these countries will maximise the investment opportunities that these markets bring.”

[“We will work with our farmers to help them meet the challenges of Brexit,” says Lesley Griffiths](#)

In a keynote speech at the Hybu Cig Cymru breakfast, the Cabinet Secretary will talk about a number of important initiatives the Welsh Government has in place to provide valuable support to farmers, many of which are particularly relevant as the UK leaves the EU and farm businesses prepare for the major change that lies ahead.

A new land capability mapping system for Wales will be launched by the Cabinet Secretary at this year’s Winter Fair – the first major update since the original maps were produced in the early 1970’s. The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Map allows land users, planners and Government to make informed choices about how agricultural land is used in Wales.

The Cabinet Secretary will also announce that over 91% of farmers’ Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) 2017 claims will be paid on Friday (1st December). Over £201m will be paid into the bank accounts of 14,111 Welsh farm businesses on the first day on which payments may be made under European rules.

Speaking ahead of the Winter Fair Lesley Griffiths said:

“Brexit will bring significant and lasting change, of that there is absolutely no doubt. A ‘no deal’ scenario presents particularly acute risks for those sectors particularly reliant on exports to

the EU including lamb.

“Leaving the Common Agricultural Policy and new, yet to be established, trading arrangements mean that maintaining the status quo is simply not an option. Turning challenges into opportunities is where the industry and individual farm businesses need to be focusing their attention.

“For our part, we are already heavily involved working alongside our key partners in seeking to address our agriculture sectors’ readiness for Brexit.

“Brexit will provide a once in a generation opportunity to redesign our policy framework in a way that is uniquely Welsh, that reflects Welsh needs and strengths.

“We all have a role to play shaping how the industry will look after Brexit and we need farmers to be bold, imaginative; open to new ideas and practices.

“With this new approach in mind, I’m pleased to today launch a new Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map for Wales. It identifies the potential versatility of land to support a range of cropping choices and allows land users, planners and Government to make informed choices on how land is used.

“My priority is to ensure our agricultural industry is in the best possible position to deal with the change ahead. As a government we are committed to providing solutions which work for Wales and we will continue to work with the industry, our partners and others to make the most of every opportunity.”

On the record payment of Basic Payment Scheme claims, the Cabinet Secretary added:

“I am delighted to announce that over 91% of farmers receiving their BPS payments on the first day. This is yet another example of the success of our uniquely Welsh approach and our exemplary record on payments. It is a tribute to the way Welsh farmers have embraced new technology, RPW Online and made the new system such a success.”

[Google for Education to be rolled out](#)

in Welsh schools next year

The new software is a direct result of feedback from schools and will be made available through Hwb – the digital learning platform for Wales which provides a range of centrally-funded, bilingual digital tools and resources.

Latest statistics for October 2017 show that there were a total of 736,813 log-ins to Hwb during the month – a 55% increase over October 2016 – which equates to an average of over 23,000 log-ins every day.

As well as announcing plans for the roll-out of Google for Education, the Cabinet Secretary also provided an update on other areas of the Learning in Digital Wales (LiDW) programme.

This included progress on investing in School Broadband – a Taking Wales Forward commitment to provide superfast broadband to all schools in Wales.

This will provide fibre connections for 343 schools across Wales via the PSBA network and will ensure schools are able to access the range of tools and resources available via Hwb, as well as supporting the new curriculum.

Today the Cabinet Secretary announced that to date, over a third of targeted schools have been upgraded to faster speeds.

Guidance will also be published shortly to help schools understand how local area network issues can affect their internet connectivity and how they can make the best use of investment from the LiDW programme.

Kirsty Williams said:

“We want our teachers to have access to the best digital tools and resources and the best quality superfast broadband.

“We have listened to the feedback we’ve been receiving from schools and I’m very pleased that, as a result of their feedback, we will be rolling out Google for Education in 2018.

“This will give our teachers a much wider range of digital tools and resources and will lead to greater collaboration and communication within the classroom.”

As a result of ongoing feedback, the Welsh Government will also not be renewing the Hwb+ virtual learning platform once the current contract expires in August 2018.

Schools, local authorities and regional education consortia will be contacted to ensure they are ready to take advantage of the new digital tools and can make the transition from the Hwb+ platform next year.

Liz Sproat from Google for Education said:

“We congratulate the Welsh Government for their commitment to provide the very best education to learners across Wales. We’re delighted that Google’s education tools will be made available to schools via the Hwb platform and look forward to supporting them on their journey with us.”

[£3m funding provided for new endoscopy and day surgery services at Wrexham Maelor Hospital](#)

The two modular theatres are planned to open in March 2018.

This capital funding, will enable the health board to address infrastructure issues which have led to the closure of two theatres in 2016, and an endoscopy suite earlier this year.

The Health Board have put in place systems to mitigate the current disruption to these services at Wrexham Maelor Hospital. This includes the hire of two mobile theatres for a six month period which the Health Board will fund and will be in place by January 2018. The funding announced today for the two modular theatres will provide new, more robust facilities for the people of Wrexham and the surrounding area for at least the next 10 years.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“Ensuring the people of Wales have access to up-to-date healthcare services in a safe environment is a priority. I’m pleased to announce over £3m worth of funding for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to take the necessary steps to improve facilities at Wrexham Maelor Hospital.

“Moreover, this will enable health professionals to work efficiently, providing high quality patient care for patients in Wrexham and the surrounding area, and meet the required performance standards.”

Chief Executive of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Gary Doherty said:

“We have been working closely with Welsh Government since the closure of the theatres in the Wrexham Maelor Hospital and we are delighted that funding has been awarded to install two new modular theatres for day case surgery. Through the addition of local capital resources we will also install an endoscopy suite.

“We are pleased that we have been able to take swift action to improve this situation. These new facilities will ensure that people in Wrexham and the surrounding area will continue to receive a high quality service going forward.”

Minister pops in to see new welcome homes

After meeting new residents, and representatives from Caerphilly CBC and United Welsh Housing Association, the Minister was shown around the new development of one bedroom apartments and two bed homes.

The Cwrt Yr Orsaf Dan scheme is on the site of the former Bargoed Fire Station and was developed by United Welsh Housing Association in partnership with Caerphilly County Borough Council, and WRW Construction Ltd.

The Welsh Government has provided grant funding of £1.4 million for this scheme which is also providing much-needed smaller properties, for those people in the borough affected by the so-called bedroom tax.

The Minister said:

“Having a decent home in a safe community has been proven to have a positive influence on health and wellbeing and plays an important role in improving life chances.

“Investing public money in building and refurbishing homes also contributes to national and local economies, creating and supporting jobs and training opportunities.

“This is also an excellent example of the benefits of partnership working between Welsh Government, local authorities and RSLs in order to achieve our ambitious affordable homes target. Meeting this target will of course be challenging, but it is one we are determined to meet head on.”