

Investing in the skills of the future for an Ambitious and Learning Wales – £50m capital boost for FE and HE and £260m for apprenticeships

Ahead of the publication of the Welsh Government's departmental spending plans later today, the Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams, announced £50m of capital funding for Further Education and Higher Education sectors to improve facilities and learning environments for students.

Over the next two years, £10m will be allocated for FE institutions to invest in industry-standard training equipment and a further £10m for essential maintenance to ensure safe learning environments.

An additional £30m (£10m in each of the next three years) will be allocated to support higher education estate rationalisation. This will expand the successful 21st century schools and education programme to include a ring-fenced fund for higher education estates; reducing surplus capacity and creating a more energy-efficient estate across Wales.

The Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James, also confirmed today that £260m will be invested for apprenticeships over the next two years (£130m in each year) to support the Welsh Government's commitment of creating 100,000 all-age apprenticeships over the life of this Assembly term.

Education Secretary Kirsty Williams said:

“Our £50m capital investment for the FE and HE sector will enable them to provide state of the art facilities, improving learning environments for students and satisfying local employer needs. This investment is crucial both for our learners and for the wider economy.

Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James said:

“We are committed to raising skills standards across the board in Wales and through our draft budget are putting investments in place to do just that.

“Apprenticeships are the start of an exciting and rewarding career, giving people an opportunity to gain on the job experience while gaining all the skills and qualifications they need.

“We are already delivering one of the most successful apprenticeship programmes in Europe – the £260m we're investing over the next two years will build on this and enable us to deliver

our commitment of creating 100,000 all-age apprenticeships over the life of this Assembly term.”

£2.7m supply teacher project announced

The new funding will support 15 local authorities to create new supply teacher arrangements across 86 schools. The project will support the appointment of around 50 recently qualified teachers who will work across groups of schools, covering teacher absence and supporting wider school improvements and learner outcomes.

This approach will nurture recently qualified teachers whilst also ensuring cover within schools. The pilot project will run during the current and next financial years and follows recommendations from the Supply Model Taskforce report published earlier this year.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Supply teachers form a significant and important part of our teaching workforce. It is vital that they are an informed part of our system, so they are ready and able to support our national mission of education reform.

“I want to improve the way that our system currently employs, manages and supports our supply teachers. I am committed to ensuring that teachers who work flexibly in this way are well equipped, appropriately rewarded, and integrated into the teaching profession.

“This new funding is about being more flexible and innovative in our approach to covering teacher absence. Under our plans, our supply teachers will be supported in the same way that permanent teachers are.

“This approach will invest in and nurture recently qualified teachers whilst also ensuring that there is sufficient cover within schools to meet demands for ALN delivery and other specialist teachers including Welsh-medium teachers.”

The Welsh Government aims for any savings identified from school supply budgets to be re-invested to build capacity in the system to support schools to manage their supply needs in a more co-ordinated, collaborative and sustainable manner.

Childcare providers asked to #TalkChildcare

The first phase of the campaign aimed to understand the current barriers parents face in accessing childcare and what's important to them about the new offer. The second phase will ask providers including childminders, nursery owners, cylchoedd meithrin and sessional care providers for their experiences in delivering childcare through online questionnaires, focus groups and direct consultation.

The campaign coincides with testing of the Childcare Offer in seven local authority areas. These pilots are currently testing all aspects of the new Childcare Offer for Wales to ensure it will be accessible to parents, deliverable for providers and sustainable in the long-term once rolled out across Wales.

The Welsh Government is also supporting the Childcare Works project which aims to support unemployed young people into a career within the early years and childcare sector. This will help to build the capacity of the sector to meet the increased demand as a result of the Childcare Offer.

Communities and Children Secretary Carl Sargeant said:

“The Childcare Offer for Wales is one of the biggest developments in the sector for many years.

“We are keen to work with Childcare providers across Wales to ensure that there is a good awareness of the Childcare Offer, and to seek feedback on their experiences delivering childcare provision. The next phase of our #TalkChildcare campaign will not only help inform our Childcare Offer, but will help us learn about how the sector can be supported to thrive across Wales.

“I urge all providers across the sector, from childminders, day nurseries, cylchoedd meithrin, sessional provision and clubs, , to have their say and share their knowledge and valuable experience with us to help us shape our new Childcare Offer for Wales.”

New law to introduce minimum price for alcohol in Wales

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill, has been introduced before the National Assembly for Wales today by the Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans.

The Bill will address longstanding and specific health concerns around the effects of excess alcohol consumption, which is estimated to lead to 50,000 alcohol-related hospital admissions a year, costing the Welsh NHS £120m annually. In 2015, there were 463 alcohol-related deaths in Wales.

The new Bill supports the Welsh Government's comprehensive strategy to tackle harmful and hazardous drinking by tackling the availability and affordability of cheap, strong alcohol, which is part of wider efforts to improve and protect the health of the population of Wales.

The Bill proposes to introduce a minimum price for alcohol supplied in Wales, and to make it an offence for alcohol to be supplied below that price. The Bill proposes that the level of the minimum unit price (MUP) for this purpose would be specified in regulations made by the Welsh Ministers.

In 2014, research on the impacts of introducing a 50p minimum unit price (for example) estimated the following:

- a 50p MUP would result in 53 fewer deaths and 1,400 fewer hospital admissions in Wales per year
- a 50p MUP would save the Welsh NHS more than £130m over 20 years, by reducing impacts on health services, such as Accident and Emergency
- it would reduce workplace absence, which is estimated would fall by up to 10,000 days per year.

Over a 20 year period, the introduction of a MUP could contribute £882m to the Welsh economy in terms of the reduction in alcohol-related illness, crime and workplace absence.

The Bill proposes:

- a formula for calculating the applicable minimum price for alcohol using the percentage strength of the alcohol, its volume and the MUP
- powers for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation to specify the MUP
- to establish a local authority-led enforcement regime with powers of entry, powers to bring prosecutions for offences and to issue fixed penalty notices.

Public Health Minister Rebecca Evans said:

"Alcohol-related harm is a significant public health problem in

Wales. The 463 alcohol-attributable deaths in 2015 were all avoidable, and each of these deaths would have had a devastating effect on the person's family and friends. Alcohol-related harm also has a big impact on public services such as the NHS.

"There is a very clear and direct link between levels of excessive drinking and the availability of cheap alcohol. So we need to take decisive action now to address the affordability of alcohol, as part of wider efforts to tackle alcohol related harm.

"The Bill I am unveiling today will tackle excessive alcohol consumption by making it an offence for retailers to sell strong alcohol at low prices. It will make an important contribution to improving health outcomes, by putting prevention and early intervention at the heart of our efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm. This will undoubtedly help save lives."

Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton said:

"As alcohol has become more affordable, consumption has increased. As consumption increases, harm increases. All alcohol-attributable deaths are avoidable deaths, demonstrating the urgency for further preventative action.

"Increasing the price of alcohol through the introduction of a minimum unit price provides us with an effective and efficient way of reducing excessive alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm.

"It will have a small impact on moderate drinkers. The most substantial effects will be experienced by harmful and hazardous drinkers, who are more likely to consume cheaper and higher strength alcohol products."

[New cancer drug to be available in Wales](#)

A patient access scheme between NHS Wales and the manufacturer, Bristol-Myers Squibb, means that it will be available to treat some people with advanced non-small cell lung cancer, if they have already been treated with chemotherapy.

Nivolumab, also known as Opdivo®, will be available where clinically appropriate no later than 60 days after the agreement was signed.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“I’m pleased NHS Wales has been able to reach an agreement with the manufacturer, which will make the drug routinely available in Wales, to patients who will benefit.

“Our £80m New Treatment Fund launched in January this year supports faster and more consistent access to medicines recommended by NICE and the AWMSG. This includes new cancer treatments – such as Nivolumab – even where the NICE recommendation is subject to a detailed agreement with the manufacturer.”