

Plan to help improve mobile connectivity in Wales

Although mobile connectivity is the responsibility of the UK Government, the Welsh Government is looking at the powers it has in order to ensure a series of actions are implemented to facilitate improving the service in Wales.

The plan sets out how the Welsh Government will work together with the mobile phone industry and the regulator to improve connectivity.

There are particular challenges in boosting mobile connectivity in Wales.

For example, data from Ofcom on television masts show that because of the country's topography Wales needs 67 masts to reach one million people, while in England to reach the same amount of people 12 masts are required, in Northern Ireland it is 25 and Scotland 45.

The series of actions follows a Mobile Roundtable held by the Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James, with mobile providers and the regulator earlier this year. The plan has been developed in consultation with those at the meeting and others including farming unions, landowners and business organisations.

It focuses on nine key areas where the Welsh Government can use the levers at its disposal and its influence to help improve connectivity and capacity.

The areas include:

- Planning – Research has been commissioned, due to be completed in the Autumn, to inform changes to permitted development rights for telecommunications equipment to improve mobile connectivity. Planning Policy Wales (PPW) will be refreshed to highlight the positive relationship between telecommunications and the economy. A revised PPW will be published for consultation by Spring 2018. We will also work with mobile network operators to revise and update the code of best practice and Technical Advice Note (TAN19)
- Non-domestic rates – Where evidence suggests that a reduction in non-domestic rates would encourage investment the Welsh Government will consider providing non-domestic rates relief on appropriate mobile mast sites.
- Innovation and emerging technologies – The Welsh Government and mobile network operators will work together to identify opportunities to develop and test innovative technologies in Wales, including 5G. There have already been success stories in Wales in this field, such as the Welsh Government working with EE in the Teifi Valley to extend coverage using small cell technology.
- Major events and special projects – Build on work already done at the Royal Welsh Show where collaborative working has resulted in a permanent mast at the showground. The Welsh Government will facilitate relationships between mobile network operators and major event organisers

The Mobile Action Plan will be reviewed regularly and updated as the actions are carried out and progress recorded.

Minister for Skills and Science Julie James said:

“Mobile phone connectivity is becoming increasingly important for both residents and businesses. We know there are challenges in Wales and that the service needs to be better.

“This plan outlines what we as a Welsh Government can do to help create the right environment to further improve connectivity in Wales. I have to be clear that we do not have the main levers as these rest with the UK Government and Ofcom, and it is important to emphasise there is not one single solution to boosting mobile connectivity.

“Wales’ topography presents many challenges and we need to ensure we strike the right balance between the local economic benefits of improved mobile coverage with the need to safeguard our sensitive landscape.

“We already have good examples of where we have worked with mobile operators to bring about innovative solutions to rural areas, and Wales will continue to play an important role in the support of emerging technologies within the mobile communications sector.

“I’m pleased this plan has come together with the co-operation of the mobile providers and stakeholders. It is by looking at various options and working together that we can all do this.

“We are already improving connectivity across Wales with the rollout of Superfast Cymru which has to date provided over 653,000 premises across the country with access to superfast broadband. While we do not have all the powers to improve mobile connectivity it is only right that we look at what we as a Welsh Government can do.

“I look forward to reporting back on the progress made on this plan. I intend the first review to take place at the turn of the year.”

Hamish MacLeod, Director of Mobile UK said:

“Mobile UK is pleased to see the publication of the Welsh Government’s Mobile Action Plan, which rightly recognises the urgent need for reform and identifies barriers to effective deployment of mobile infrastructure.

“The Mobile Action Plan commits the Welsh Government to work with the mobile industry, Ofcom and others to deliver effective reform.

The challenge now is to realise this ambition and implement the proposals promptly.”

[First Minister opens new £22m college campus in Aberdare](#)

More than 600 students will attend the new state-of-the-art campus, which was supported with £11m from the Welsh Government’s 21st Century Schools and Education programme.

The 21st Century Schools programme is the largest investment in Welsh schools and colleges since the 1960s, which will see over £1.4bn being invested in the 5 years to 2019.

As well as offering courses in more traditional subjects such as computing and science, Coleg y Cymoedd offers practical courses including bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, electrical installation and plumbing that are designed to meet the demands of local employers.

First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, said:

“I am proud the Welsh Government has supported this new college with £11m of funding. When you look around this fantastic site, you can see it has been money well spent.

“This new college provides students with an impressive learning environment and the very best resources to help them reach their full potential. As well as benefitting teachers and students, the college will be an invaluable community resource for the people of Aberdare to use and enjoy.”

Judith Evans, principal of Coleg y Cymoedd, said:

“This is truly a day of celebration as we officially open the doors of the new campus to showcase the facility Aberdare has been waiting for. We believe that it is the right of all in Wales to have access to high quality education and training that leads to real employment paths.

“We are grateful to Welsh Government for joining us in our mission to ensure that our communities in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Caerphilly can access the facilities and opportunities they deserve. Our thanks also go to the businesses who work with us each year to

allow our learners to gain the experience and job opportunities that will see them prosper.”

The official opening was also attended by Aberdare-born Dr Lyn Evans, who flew home to Wales from the CERN site in Switzerland to talk about the importance of encouraging people to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Wales secures the highest number of finalists for WorldSkills UK competition

The WorldSkills UK finals will take place at Birmingham’s NEC between 16 and 18 November as part of the NEC’s annual Skills Show, the largest skills and careers event in the UK.

The competition is used to benchmark excellence across a range of vocational skills areas. It is also used as part of the selection process for WorldSkills, a global competition held every two years where the UK regions compete as one team. These finals are part of the selection process for WorldSkills 2019, which is being held in Kazan.

A total of 462 competitors are taking part in the WorldSkills UK finals, which consists of up to 60 national competitions where entrants battle it out for Gold, Silver and Bronze award recognition. Of that figure, 74 competitors are Welsh, which is 16% of the UK total and by far the highest regional representation.

In addition to the 74 Welsh finalists taking part in the national competitions, a further nineteen entrants will be representing Wales at the Skills Show in other competitions, bringing Wales’ overall number of entrants to this year’s Skills Show to 93.

The additional competitors are the ‘Kazan cohort’; nine talented students who have already met the qualifying criteria for Kazan 2019 so will now be competing to for a place on WorldSkills’ Team UK. Ten entrants are also taking part in the ‘Inclusive Skills’ competitions, which have been specifically designed for those with disabilities.

Welcoming the news, Skills and Science Minister Julie James said:

“That Wales has been recognised as the top region for entries in

the whole of the UK is a reflection of our skills excellence and the huge collaborative effort from partners that we have here in Wales.

“Through Skills Competitions we are creating a highly skilled nation that will support our economy, safeguard our industries and improve the prospects of Wales.

“I wish everyone taking part in next month’s competitions the very best of luck and would like to thank those who have supported them on their journey for all their hard work and dedication to help make this happen.”

Lifepoint Centre in Swansea opens thanks to £308,768 Welsh Government funding

The Lifepoint Centre has been refurbished and extended with the help of £308,768 with from the Welsh Government’s Community Facilities Programme matching the Church’s own contribution.

On a visit to the official opening of the Lifepoint Centre, Communities and Children’s Secretary, Carl Sargeant said:

“I’ve enjoyed meeting the staff and volunteers at the Lifepoint Centre and seeing the work that has been done with the grant from the Community Facilities Programme.

“The centre will now be well placed to provide access to vital services and to provide volunteering, education and training opportunities well into the future. The range of activities on offer will provide people of all ages with a chance to socialise and build new friendships.

“The Community Facilities Programme is not just about improving buildings. It’s also about empowering local people to get more involved with their community as a way of improving their daily lives.

“The programme has to date provided funding totalling over £16 million to 60 projects across Wales.”

Economy Secretary speaks to business about challenges of EU Exit

Earlier today the Economy Secretary chaired the first meeting of a working group made up from the Council for Economic Development which includes business representatives, Wales TUC and Wales Coop. The working group has been specifically established to focus on the impact that the UK's exit from the EU will have on the business sector in Wales.

Ken Skates said:

"I am pleased to be chairing this new working group which will facilitate joint working between the business sector and Government and help us to develop increased understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by the UK's exit from the EU.

"We have been regularly discussing EU exit at the Council for Economic Development, and at other fora, but this new group will allow that joint working to evolve into practical interventions that can help and support businesses at this unprecedented time.

"Since the referendum we have been engaging widely with businesses right across Wales to understand the risks and opportunities of Brexit, and just this morning I was speaking to our Anchor Companies and our growing medium sized companies about this very issue.

"We recognise of course that businesses have concerns around the uncertainty ahead and about specific issues around access to the Single Market and tariff and non-tariff barriers. But there will also be potential opportunities presented by Brexit including around procurement and developing a really strong brand for Wales and it is important that we work together to explore those opportunities.

"This working group will also provide a useful opportunity for us to hear views on the sector's priorities for trade, post Brexit. We are working hard to protect our share of European trade during the Brexit negotiations and beyond, with an emphasis on full and unfettered access to the single markets and a smooth transition but we also want to focus on supporting businesses looking to enter new and expanding markets around the world.

"Just last week a trade mission of Welsh companies set off to Qatar and Kuwait with a view to expanding their share of markets in the

Middle East. We will continue to work proactively with companies wishing to drive up their exports and to support them through the Brexit transition period.”