

£1m to strengthen how Foundation Phase is delivered in Wales

The Foundation Phase encourages children to be creative and imaginative, making learning more enjoyable and effective. The funding will be used to develop a Foundation Phase Excellence Network, which will support the sharing of effective practice and work closely with the National Networks of Excellence in Science and Technology and Mathematics, which are already being developed.

Recent independent evaluations have shown that where Foundation Phase is being implemented well, it is raising the attainment of all children, but highlighted the need for greater consistency of delivery.

The new excellence network will:

- Help strengthen the links between schools, settings, consortia and local authorities to universities to develop research on professional learning for Foundation Phase practitioners.
- Use global and local evidence to develop nationally recognised Foundation Phase professional learning for staff.
- Support Pioneer Network Schools in the development of and professional learning for the new curriculum.
- Improve children's experiences of the Foundation Phase in settings and schools across Wales.

Minister for Life Long Learning Alun Davies said:

"The evidence shows that the Foundation Phase is working for our youngest pupils, with the majority achieving the expected results for their age.

"I want to make sure we build on this progress and continue to support our young people through their early years to make sure they have the best start in life. This investment will help us develop the skills of those who teach the foundation phase, create new training opportunities and ensure there is consistency across Wales.

Education Secretary Kirsty Williams said:

"The £1m for the Foundation Phase Excellence Network is part of our on-going investment to raise standards across our education system. We want to make sure our pupils have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed and thrive in the modern world."

Professor Iram Siraj from the Institute of Education, London said,

“The Foundation Phase in Wales is leading in the UK in providing a curriculum and approach which provides true, seamless continuity in children’s learning from the early years to the middle of primary. We have seen a move away from over-formalised and over-controlled classrooms to spaces where experiential learning, enquiry and creativity is valued alongside literacy and numeracy.”

Professor David Egan, Cardiff Metropolitan University said,

“The Foundation Phase Excellence Network is a very welcome step to promoting the excellent learning and teaching practice which should be at the heart of the future development of the curriculum for 3-7 year olds.”

Professor Edward Melhuish, Professor of Human Development, Birkbeck, University of London said,

“The developments to the Foundation Phase have already brought improvements in early years provision for the children of Wales. The new investment in the Foundation Phase Excellence Network promises yet further improvements in professional development that will benefit all.”

Welsh Laverbread achieves protected status

It joins other great Welsh produce, such as Conwy Mussels, Welsh Lamb and Halen Môn/Anglesey Sea Salt, as well as other well-known European products, such as Champagne and Parma Ham, which have been recognised for their distinct quality and awarded protection against imitation and misuse.

Welsh Laverbread is protected by the European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status, which will provide consumers with the confidence they are eating the genuine Welsh product.

In total, 12 Welsh products have now been awarded Protected status.

The Welsh Government has supported Selwyn’s Seafood, based in Penclawdd in the Gower, over the past four years during the complicated and extensive

application process.

Laverbread is a well-known Welsh delicacy recognised both within and outside Wales. Its taste and appearance is affected by the cleanliness and temperature of the sea water, as well as the method of producing it, making it a characteristic of its origin.

Collecting the laver, a type of seaweed, to make Welsh Laverbread was a small cottage industry in Pembrokeshire, dating back to 1800. The laver was thrown over thatched huts to dry before being sold to businesses in Swansea where it was cooked into Welsh Laverbread and sold at local markets.

Welcoming the protected status for Welsh Laverbread, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“Wales’ reputation for high-quality food and drink continues to go from strength to strength. I am delighted Welsh Laverbread is the latest Welsh product to join our growing list of food and drink awarded protected status. It is very much an icon of Welsh food, which brings to mind its historic origins on the beaches of west Wales.

“Food and drink is a priority sector of the Welsh Government, which is why we have set an ambitious target to grow the sector by 30% by 2020. The recognition from the European Commission is important as it demonstrates the quality of Wales’ unique produce as we strive to reach new markets to grow the industry and prepare for a future outside of the EU.”

Nearly 40,000 jobs supported by Welsh Government as employment in Wales hits record high

Ken Skates confirmed that 38,497 jobs were supported in Wales in 2016/17 as a result of Welsh Government interventions.

Over the same period, 1086 individuals were helped into work through the Welsh Government’s flagship Jobs Growth Wales programme.

The latest figures mean that in 2016/17 the Welsh Government recorded its second best performance on job support in recent years. The figures were second only to 2015/16 when the Welsh Government supported 40,044 jobs.

Ken Skates said:

“Earlier today the First Minister welcomed latest ONS Labour Market statistics that showed the number of people employed in Wales had risen by 25,000 over the last three months, meaning employment levels here now stands at an historic record 73.7 per cent.

“Indeed over the last year the rate of employment in Wales has improved by more than double the UK average.

“The Welsh Government is working tirelessly to drive up employment levels and to support companies across Wales to survive, thrive and expand.

“These latest figures show that our hard work and ambition is paying dividends, with the Welsh Government having supported nearly 80,000 jobs in the last 2 years and around 170,000 jobs over the past five.

“We will continue to support businesses across Wales and ensure we have the right economic conditions to drive up employment levels, support sustainable jobs and training, and spread prosperity right across Wales.”

No “Best Before Date” for Welsh Workers

To raise awareness of this fact and encourage more employers to recognise the importance of retraining, retaining and recruiting older workers the Welsh Government has launched a campaign today.

The ‘People don’t have a Best Before Date’ campaign points out the critical importance of older workers to businesses. It is the latest initiative under the Welsh Government’s Age of Investment drive to ensure Wales has the skills it needs to compete in the global marketplace, both now and in the future.

The Welsh Government has teamed up with Learning and Work Institute, Business in the Community (BITC) Cymru and the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales to launch the marketing campaign, which seeks to challenge stereotypes, demonstrate the value of a multigenerational workforce and encourage employers to continually invest in skills throughout their colleagues’ working lives.

A number of workers from a cross-section of exemplar Welsh businesses that have shown a commitment to investing in an all-age workforce are supporting

the 'People don't have a best before date' campaign and their stories will feature prominently in the campaign's promotional materials.

Using a mix of radio and digital advertising and downloadable advice guides and toolkits, the campaign aims to illustrate to employers the tangible business benefits of creating a skilled, effective, multi-generational workforce.

Harding Evans is one of the companies supporting the campaign. Practice Director, Joy Phillips, said the business was committed to investing in the recruitment, retention and retraining of older employees.

"People both young and old want to develop and if you don't give them the opportunity then you will lose them. We believe having a multi-generational workforce not only benefits the individuals but will address any future skills shortages and again make a difference to the business in the long-term by securing our future owners."

Commenting on the launch of this campaign and highlighting why it has never been more important for companies to recognise how valuable their older worker are, Skills and Science Minister, Julie James, said:

"Older workers are vital for the future prosperity of our economy and our businesses. Retaining people, developing their skills throughout their working life and recruiting older workers has never been more critical to business survival as well as growth.

"Our workforce in Wales is getting older and young people joining the labour market will not fill all of the vacancies. This campaign is designed to encourage all employers – but particularly SMEs where the loss of skills and cost of recruitment can be more consequential – that they need older workers to survive and grow.

"We hope it will reinforce the issue to Welsh businesses of all sizes and give them practical advice on how they can manage and retain the skills and experience of their older workers, and appeal to the market of older recruits."

The campaign is being supported by BITC Cymru, Learning and Work Institute Wales and the Older People's Commissioner for Wales.

Matt Appleby, Director of BITC Cymru, explained why they were keen to get involved.

"This campaign carries a really important message for Welsh business. With pension changes, people staying fitter and living longer, and many companies struggling to recruit the talent they

need, businesses need to make the most of their older workers' potential and continue to inspire, hire and develop people throughout their working lives."

David Hagendyk, Director of Learning and Work Institute Wales, said they had been keen to launch the campaign during their Skills for Work Week:

"People often leave work before they are ready to, taking their skills and experience with them. Employers across Wales need to take steps to try and keep their staff longer, by offering flexible working patterns or retraining into different roles."

Sarah Rochira, Older People's Commissioner for Wales said that as well as retraining, and retaining employees, the recruitment of new older workers was also a key issue.

"It is important that older people have the opportunity to remain in or regain employment as they can play a key role in the workplace. This campaign will help employers to think more closely about the value of employing older people and utilising their wealth of knowledge and experience in the workplace, as well as the benefits that remaining in work can have on older people's health and wellbeing."

The Welsh Government's Age of Investment campaign promotes the need for wider skills development to help businesses and individuals to thrive and prosper. Employers are encouraged to invest more in the skills of their workforce and individuals of all ages are encouraged to develop the skills they need for a successful working life.

For employers looking for more information on how they can invest in the skills of their older workers, the Welsh Government's [Skills Gateway for Business](#) (external link) has a range of advice and guidance.

£20 million extra every year for social services

The funding, which has been made available as a result of consequential funding from the UK Government's March budget, will help ensure the system is sustainable for the future and responds to the pressures facing local government.

The recurrent funding will be invested in three priority areas:

- £9 million will increase funding already made available to manage workforce costs, and promote the stability of the social care market
- £8 million will support work to prevent children from entering care and improve outcomes for those leaving care
- £3 million will be provided to local authorities to support respite for carers given the critical role they play

Prevention is at the heart of the allocation, with the investment designed to pay dividends in the long term.

The extra funding confirmed today means a total of £55 million of additional funding will be invested in social care in 2017-18.

Minister for Social Services and Public Health, Rebecca Evans, said:

“The Welsh Government has long recognised social services as a sector of national strategic importance, which is why we continue to invest heavily in this area. I am pleased today to confirm an extra £20 million each year will be invested in social services, as a result of the consequential funding we received following March’s budget.

“Our focus is on prevention – the funding will have a significant positive impact on people’s lives, while at the same time reducing costs for local government in the longer term.

“The investment will improve outcomes for the most vulnerable people in society. It will be used to improve the sustainability of the social care market, reduce the numbers of children going into care, and improve support for carers.”