

Home energy efficiency improvements are having a positive impact on health

Findings published today in the [Fuel Poverty Health Data Linking report](#) show lower health service use among people who had benefited from the Welsh Government Warm Homes Nest scheme.

The study used NHS data to compare the health service use of people who had benefited from Nest home energy improvements and a control group who were eligible for improvements, but were still waiting for these to be completed.

The research found GP events for respiratory illness fell by almost 4% for those who had benefited from Nest improvements, while these rose by almost 10% in the control group over the same period.

A similar pattern was found in relation to asthma events, with a 6.5% decrease in the recipient group and a 12.5% increase in the control group for the same period.

Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“These findings show not only is our successful Warm Homes Nest scheme helping to reduce energy bills while reducing emissions, but is also having a positive impact on the health and well-being of some of Wales’ most vulnerable households.

“This is why I am pleased we are continuing to invest in home energy efficiency improvements for low income houses and have committed £104million over the next four years to improve up to 25,000 more homes through the Welsh Government Warm Homes Programme.”

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

“The Well-being of Future Generations Act requires public bodies to work together to improve well-being, and to create a healthier Wales. This research is encouraging as we work to collaborate with communities to improve health and well-being and think differently about the way we deliver services. Preventing ill-health is much better for the individual than treating it.”

Professor Ronan Lyons, Associate Director of the Administrative Data Research Centre Wales (ADRC-W), based at Swansea University Medical School, said:

“We are delighted that ADRC-W has again been able to assist the

Welsh Government in its analysis of how the Warm Homes Nest scheme has affected Welsh homes and the health of the people living in them.”

The emerging research findings have been used in the development of the new Warm Homes Nest scheme and as a result eligibility for a package of free home energy efficiency measures has been extended to low income homes with members suffering from respiratory and circulatory conditions.

ESRC Chief Executive, Professor Jane Elliott, added:

“The project findings demonstrate the power of linked administrative data for research and policy evaluation and provide robust evidence to inform more cost-effective program delivery and services to improve people’s health and quality of life in Wales. The ESRC-funded Administrative Data Research Network is supporting many other important research projects across the UK that provide evidence on a range of social and policy issues that can only be answered by linking government administrative data.”

Barefoot boost for computing science in Welsh primary schools

A new national project to help boost the computing skills of Welsh primary school children has been launched today (Weds 5 Apr) by Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams.

The Barefoot Computing project in Wales aims to help primary school teachers get to grips with computing so that they can inspire and excite pupils aged from five about the world of IT.

The initiative is funded and led by BT, which has worked closely with the Welsh Government to ensure resources for the project in Wales are closely aligned to the Digital Competence Framework and are available bilingually via the Hwb digital learning platform.

Kirsty Williams visited Cadoxton Primary School in Barry to see a Barefoot workshop in action and unveiled the new online resources for teachers, which have been tailored to the Welsh curriculum in both English and Welsh.

The free, bilingual, downloadable resources and lesson plans are targeted to help primary school teachers across Wales, some of whom may not have specialist computing knowledge.

The resources focus on concepts such as algorithms, abstraction, programming and data structures and provide ideas on how they can be used in the classroom.

Kirsty Williams said,

“Since becoming Education Secretary, one of my key priorities has been to raise the aspirations for all our children and young people, broadening horizons and developing ambition so that all can achieve. The DCF is an important milestone in achieving this goal as it provides the fundamental skills our children need in the modern world. I am therefore delighted to launch these free-to-use, creative resources which perfectly illustrate how digital skills can be integrated into the Welsh curriculum.”

Every primary school head teacher in Wales will be contacted by the Barefoot team to highlight the new resources, which have already won acclaim from teachers elsewhere in the UK.

More than one million primary school pupils across the UK have already benefited from Barefoot since being launched in 2014. It forms part of BT’s long-term commitment to help build a culture of tech literacy and reach five million young people in the UK by 2020.

Alwen Williams, regional director for BT Cymru Wales, said:

“Computing is a vital skill for the future prosperity of Wales.

“Young people need these skills in order to thrive in our increasingly competitive and digital world while businesses and organisations of all sizes need recruits that are tech literate in order to succeed.

“Our children grow up surrounded by technology, but too many have little idea how it all works – their knowledge is only screen-deep.

“BT’s tech literacy programme is designed to inspire young people to ‘get’ tech concepts and to find them exciting and relevant, but we’re also aware that teachers need to feel confident to support young people.

“That’s where the Barefoot Computing project comes in, and we’re looking forward to seeing it take shape in Wales and having a real impact in our primary schools.”

Bill Mitchell, director of education at BCS, which was responsible for originally creating Barefoot Computing in collaboration with the Department

for Education, Raspberry Pi and BT, said:

“It’s essential that all children develop computational thinking skills right from the start of primary school, which is why the Barefoot Computing project is so important as it gives teachers the educational tools they need to develop these skills in their pupils.”

“By backing the Barefoot Computing project the Welsh Government has shown the leadership and vision necessary to ensure all primary schoolchildren in Wales now have the chance to develop those skills and as adults successfully compete in the global digital economy.”

Pupils and practitioners in Wales can access the bilingual materials at hwb.wales.gov.uk Schools will soon be able request a workshop to demonstrate how the resources and lesson plans can be used.

Bill to introduce first new Welsh tax in 800 years is passed

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said the passage of the Land Transaction Tax and Anti-avoidance of Devolved Taxes (Wales) Bill marked a significant step in Wales’ devolution journey.

Land transaction tax, which will replace stamp duty land tax, will come into effect on April 1, 2018. The revenue raised will help to fund public services in Wales.

The tax will be payable on the purchase or lease of a building or land in Wales over a certain price and includes a higher rate on additional residential properties – the higher rate has been payable in Wales through stamp duty land tax since April 2016.

In 2015-16, £153m was raised from stamp duty land tax in Wales, with just under 59,000 transactions taking place. This is expected to rise to £263m by 2018-19.

The Finance Secretary will announce the rates and bands for land transaction tax by October 1 and the regulations will be laid after the UK Autumn Budget.

Welcoming the passing of the Bill by the National Assembly, Professor Drakeford said:

“This is a significant milestone in devolution – for the first time in almost 800 years Wales will have its own taxes.

“This is a tax which affects so many of us. Once law, the Bill will enable us to introduce a land transaction tax to replace stamp duty land tax, ensuring public services in Wales will continue to benefit from the revenues raised by this important tax.

“We consulted widely in developing the tax and were able to learn from the devolution of the tax to Scotland. While the new tax provides consistency and stability for businesses and provides a smooth transaction for home buyers, we have been able to make a number of improvements to the tax reflecting Welsh needs and priorities.”

Land transaction tax is one of two taxes to be devolved to Wales in April 2018 – landfill tax will be replaced with a landfill disposals tax. The Landfill Disposals Tax (Wales) Bill is currently being considered by the National Assembly.

Professor Drakeford added:

“The devolution of tax powers in a year’s time will change the nature of devolution in Wales. It brings with it additional responsibility for the Welsh Government and National Assembly and a chance to make a real difference to public services in Wales.”

The Land Transaction Tax and Anti-avoidance of Devolved Taxes (Wales) Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent (when the Bill becomes an Act) in May 2017.

Mission possible for Welsh tech companies to supply the space sector

Sponsored by Welsh Government and supported by ESTnet (the network for the Welsh technology sector), the event at Cardiff City Stadium is open to all technology companies in Wales, especially those working in software technologies including big data, analytics, internet of things and cyber-security.

The key message to Welsh tech companies is that many of the tools, services, technologies and products they develop can be utilised by the space industry which is actively looking to other sectors for the development of products and technologies to support growth.

The event is backed by a number of high profile organisations with speakers from both the UK and European Space Agencies, The Satellite Applications Catapult, Airbus, Seraphim Capital and Thales Alenia Space.

Opportunities for Welsh businesses to benefit from the wider space industry will also be highlighted later this month (Wednesday 26 April) at an event organised by Aberystwyth University entitled **Space and Earth Monitoring: identifying business growth opportunities**.

It is aimed at businesses interested in developing their knowledge and involvement with the space sector and will provide information on possible funding and collaborative opportunities and on skills development.

It is targeted at a range of companies from environmental consultancies to UAV specialists and from software developers to satellite developers and specialists in robotics and photonics.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“These events illustrate the growing prospects that the space industry offers Welsh businesses and present a great opportunity to learn more about the sector.

“The key message is that there are opportunities for savvy SMEs in the tech sector to play an important part in supporting the growth of the space sector and that this presents a very real next market opportunity for Welsh Tech companies.”

There will be a mix of presentations to inform and introduce businesses to current and future opportunities within the space industries as well as the support available through Innovate UK, the KTN, academic institutions and the Catapults.

Avril Lewis, managing director of the ESTnet, said:

“The development of the UK space industry presents enormous potential for the Welsh technology sector.

“As the network for the Wales’ fast-growing technology industry, we know the valuable contribution our members can make to drive the development of the UK’s space efforts. It is essential that we ensure our members are given every chance to explore such opportunities and pursue valuable partnerships with organisations and companies working within the UK space industry.”

Smoking at all time low as Wales marks 10th anniversary of ban

The percentage of adults smoking is now at a record low. The Welsh Health Survey 2015 showed that 19% of adults smoke, a significant decrease from 25% in 2005/6. This has exceeded the Welsh Government target of reducing smoking rates to 20% by 2016.

The Minister marked the occasion by visiting Malpas Court Primary School in Newport. The school has recently achieved the National Quality Award as part of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS) and is the 130th School in Wales to do so. Tobacco use is one of the topics covered under the scheme. Pupils talked to the Minister about smoking and shared their thoughts on what a smokefree Wales means to them.

Clare Harvey, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator at Malpas Court Primary School said:

“As a smokefree school, we provide an environment that protects and promotes the health and wellbeing of the entire school community.

Through our PSE curriculum pupils learn how smoking is addictive, expensive and could have a detrimental effect on their health. As a Healthy School, we are invested in educating our pupils about such issues which protects them and our future generations. We are proud to be one of a small number of schools in Newport to be awarded the Healthy Schools NQA and we encourage our pupils to embrace this in daily school life.”

To help continue this success, the Minister has today announced funding of £417,000 over three years to ASH Wales, the leading third sector organisation working for a smokefree Wales. The funding will contribute to the delivery of the Welsh Government’s Tobacco Control Action Plan, which aims to reduce the prevalence of adult smoking to 16% by 2020.

Chief Executive of the tobacco control campaign group ASH Wales Cymru, Suzanne Cass, said:

“The smoking ban is one of the most important steps forward our nation has taken to protect our health. Since the ban was implemented in 2007, we have seen an incredible change in attitudes towards smoking which has resulted in 5% less people and 94,000 fewer adults still smoking.

“Thanks to this incredible funding from Welsh Government, we can continue to work together to support the remaining 19% of those still addicted to tobacco to choose smokefree and lead a healthier, happier life for themselves and their families.”

The Minister said:

“The ban on smoking in indoor public places has been a huge success. The percentage of adults smoking is now at a record low. This will improve people’s health and life expectancy, and will reduce pressures on the NHS.

“It also means that future generations are protected from the effects of smoking, and do not grow up seeing it as a normal activity.

“We are continuing our efforts to support smokers to quit by signposting them to free NHS cessation services. If passed, the Public Health Bill will ban smoking in playgrounds, schools and hospital grounds, to continue the remarkable culture-change we have seen around smoking in Wales in recent years. I want everyone in Wales to ‘Choose Smokefree’.”