

Education Secretary Kirsty Williams praises Wrexham specialist school

The school is one of the leading special needs education facilities in the country and the Education Secretary toured the classrooms to see the excellent work undertaken there.

St Christopher's is a maintained special school for pupils aged between 6-19 years with a range of special educational needs and was awarded 'Excellent' in their last Estyn inspection in 2014.

In December last year the schools was awarded Welsh Government funding through the Arts Council to allow pupils to access artistic events that would normally be restricted due to the financial costs.

Kirsty Williams said:

"I want to thank everyone for welcoming me here today, I know that a school is a busy place so I appreciate you giving me your time and showing me the facilities.

"St Christopher's inclusive approach to education is to be welcomed and I've been impressed by how they support all learners to gain the qualifications they need for their next stage of learning. Others have much to learn from your approach.

"Within the education system we want to improve the aspirations of those who need extra support. Our Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Bill, will, if passed, completely overhaul the system for supporting pupils with additional learning needs."

The Welsh Government recently announced £20 million of planned investment to support learners with additional learning needs.

EU funding to support jobseekers in Powys

The funding will support the new Workways+ Powys project, which will be delivered by Powys Council and PRIME Cymru. It will target out-of-work people aged 54 and over.

Workways+ Powys will run for three years and help people looking to start

their own business; return to work or hoping to take part in volunteering opportunities to improve their skills and confidence.

It will offer support with jobseeking and interview skills; help with CV writing and the chance to gain vocational qualifications and take part in work experience placements.

Around 50 volunteer mentors will be recruited and trained to provide one-to-one mentoring to people looking to return to work in Powys as part of the project.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“EU funding is making a huge contribution to boosting the skills and prospects of people in Wales through projects like Workways, as well as apprenticeships, traineeships, graduate programmes and schemes to help young people pursue careers in STEM industries.

“I’m very pleased to announce this further investment, which will fund important services and new opportunities for people in Powys to get back into work and develop new careers.”

David Pugh, chief executive of PRIME Cymru said.

“We are delighted to be working with Powys Council on this truly innovative approach to supporting mature individuals who have so much to offer both Powys and the economy of Wales as a whole.

“This project will be one of the very first in Wales dedicated to supporting this age group back into economic activity.”

Two EU backed property development funds set to create £40m infrastructure boost for West Wales and the Valleys

The £7m Property for Business Development Grant Fund (PBDG) and the £7m Property Infrastructure Fund (PIF) are each expected to attract £13m of private sector investment and geared to stimulate the market to meet the

needs of businesses.

Both Funds aim to bridge the financial viability gap that exists in parts of Wales between the cost of building, expanding or refurbishing properties and the completed market value of the property.

It is expected that together the schemes will deliver around 51,100m² (550,000sq.ft.) of new and refurbished floor space in areas that will provide tangible benefits to local economies, address market needs and support business growth.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“We know that private developers and businesses are reluctant to invest in some geographical areas simply because the cost of building or refurbishing a property is more than the end value of that property.

“These two new schemes, backed by EU funds, are geared to address this specific issue and will provide a significant investment boost. The grant support will stimulate the market, create new high quality industrial space and offices to accommodate jobs and meet the needs of business.”

Both funds are for new build and refurbishments/extensions/adaptions with the Property Infrastructure Fund aimed specifically at advance build developments and the Property for Business Development Grant Fund targeted at supporting businesses with bespoke expansion projects. The overall grant intervention rate for both Funds is 35%.

The successful projects, selected in conjunction with the regional stakeholders across Wales, will be those that achieve best value for money and create the greatest economic impact. The primary focus will be on projects in Enterprise Zones, Local Growth Zones and City Regions.

Stage 1 Applications, providing brief information on the project requiring support, will need to be submitted by the **30 April 2017** in order to be considered for a provisional allocation of funding.

For more information and an application form for businesses interested in the Property for Business Development Grant or developers interested in the Property Infrastructure Fund to support advance build development should email gde.pdg@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

Partnership between Jesus College Oxford and Wales' brightest students unveiled at major education summit

The partnership between the University of Oxford College and the Welsh Government's Seren Network will see a selection of Wales' brightest students attend a bespoke summer school at Jesus College in August this year.

Students from each of the 11 Seren Network hubs across Wales will be given the opportunity to apply for the four-day summer school, where they will sample student life and attend lectures on demography, artificial intelligence, climate, trade, politics and literature.

Unveiled today by Welsh Government Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language at the Seren Network's second annual Beyond the Curriculum conference in mid-Wales, the summer school is thought to be the first aimed at solely Welsh students.

Speaking at the event, Welsh Government Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language, Alun Davies, said:

“Raising the aspirations and attainment levels of Welsh school pupils to help them reach their academic potential is an ongoing priority for Welsh Government, and the Seren Network is playing a pivotal role in this ambition.

“Since its inception in 2015, the Network has quickly grown to a recognised and valuable vehicle through which some 2000 of the brightest pupils in Wales are now channelling and honing their academic talents.

“Today's announcement adds another tangible benefit for students. By enabling Wales' most academically gifted pupils to sample life at one of the world's best academic institutions, we are demonstrating that educational excellence is well within their reach, and equipping them with hands-on support and guidance to make sure they reach the top.

Professor Sir Nigel Shadbolt, the Principal of Jesus College, Oxford, said:

“Jesus College is incredibly proud of its enduring connection to Wales, a connection that goes back to the College's foundation in 1571. This new initiative will help ensure that we continue to

welcome future generations of talented Welsh students here in Oxford.

“The Seren Network works in partnership with organisations including the Sutton Trust to identify all opportunities and support Seren students to make informed decisions about their futures. Morgan Cronin, from the Merthyr-RCT Seren hub, attended a Sutton Trust-organised summer school at Yale and now has an unconditional offer to study there.”

[New teacher training changes to attract the best to the profession – Kirsty Williams](#)

The Welsh Government has revealed changes for initial teacher education (ITE) that include strengthening how schools and universities work together and increasing the role of research.

The latest accreditation criteria are part of the Welsh Government’s national mission to reform education and include:

- An increased role for schools.
- A clearer role for universities.
- Structured opportunities to link school and university learning.
- A greater emphasis on research.

The changes come after the recently published new professional teaching and leadership standards.

Kirsty Williams said:

“I want teaching in Wales to be a first choice profession so that we can attract the very best. For this to happen, we must get our initial teacher education offer right.

“The new accreditation standards are part of our national mission to raise the standards and standing of the profession.

“The teaching profession can only make its proper contribution to raising standards of education in our schools if our initial teacher training offers our future teachers the skills, knowledge and appetite to lead the change required.

“This is about our schools and universities working together, using

the best research available, so our teachers have the right skills to deliver our new curriculum for the benefit of all our pupils.”

The Education Secretary also announced that the Education Workforce Council (EWC), through the establishment of the Initial School Teacher Training Committee (the Board) will accredit individual ITE programmes.

She added:

“I am delighted to announce that the public appointment process for the Chair, and Deputy Chair, of the EWC ‘Board’ is now open. The establishment of the Board will enable more specific consideration of how ITE programmes will raise the quality of provision – attracting the right people with the right qualifications and an aptitude for teaching, to enter the profession.”

The Education Secretary wants international evidence and best practice to help guide Wales’ education reforms. From today the OECD will be holding an international workshop in Cardiff to help further develop ITE in Wales.