

Welsh exports up by £500 million

The latest export statistics – published this week – show that the value of Welsh exports stood at £16.9 billion in the year to September 2018, compared to £16.4bn the previous year.

Of those Welsh exports 60.9% went to EU countries. This is 11 percentage points higher than the UK share which stands at 49.9%.

The figures also show that Welsh exports to the EU countries increased by £452m, an increase of 4.6% on the previous 12 months. Meanwhile exports to non-EU countries went up by £45m (0.7%).

Germany continued to be the top export destination for Welsh goods with 18.8% of total exports finding their way there, while 50.6% of Welsh exports fell into the category of Machinery and Transport Equipment.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“These latest statistics show another significant hike in the level of Welsh exports and I would like to congratulate businesses across Wales who have helped to deliver this impressive success. The figures are the result of a lot of hard work and determination by our businesses in what are undoubtedly challenging and uncertain economic times.

Our Economic Action Plan, which I launched a year ago now, prioritises exports and trade, and puts a focus on helping businesses retain their existing trading partners while supporting them to branch out into other global markets and we will continue to work closely and proactively with the business community to support this.

Once again these statistics highlight the economic importance of our excellent trading relationships with EU countries, which currently account for 60.9% of our total exports. We have been clear that the UK Government’s proposal for the future relationship with EU falls far short of providing the stability and certainty needed for the long term.

We will keep calling on the UK Government to deliver a Brexit that embraces the future relationship with the EU set out in Securing Wales’ Future, ensures Wales enjoys full and unfettered access to the Single Market and retains the ability to participate in a customs union. This will enable us to maintain and build on the significant successes our exports businesses which in turn will help to drive the growth of our economy.”

Welsh Government announces North Wales Growth Deal commitment

The Welsh Government's investment in the Growth Deal will be in addition to its existing commitments in North Wales.

The UK Government announced it will contribute £120m to the North Wales Growth Deal in the UK Autumn Budget in October. But the Welsh Government will urge the UK Government to go further and meet the deal's original aspirations

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy said:

"I'm pleased to announce today that the Welsh Government will match the UK Government's contribution to the North Wales Growth Deal.

"We are fully committed to delivering a transformative growth deal and are working with partners to get the package and direction right for North Wales.

"We will continue to work to ensure our funding contribution and the UK Government's meets the aspirations of the deal. We believe we need to keep pressing the UK Government to provide what the ambition board had been expecting and should its contribution increase, we will match it."

The Welsh Government's contribution to the deal is above and beyond existing investments and commitments in North Wales.

In the Cabinet Secretary's portfolio alone, these include more than £600m in transport infrastructure improvements, including the £135m Caernarfon to Bontnewydd bypass and improvements to the A55 and A494. Plans for the third Menai crossing continue to progress, with the recent announcement of the preferred route.

Other investments include £20m in the Menai Science Park, which is the first of its kind in Wales and the £20m for the Advanced Manufacturing Research Institute, in Broughton, which will help attract businesses to North Wales and improve skills.

Mr Skates added:

"With our existing investments, together with today's announcement, we are investing hundreds of millions of pounds in North Wales demonstrating that the continued improvement to the infrastructure

and economy of the region is our priority.

“We all need to work together, the UK Government, Welsh Government, local authorities and private sector partners to make the best possible success of the deal.”

First Minister delivers Seasons Greetings to winner of Christmas card competition

Nearly 800 entries were received for this year's competition, from Year 3 and 4 pupils across Wales and for the first time since launching the competition, entries were received from Ysgol y Gaiman in Patagonia.

The winning entry was drawn by 8 year old Ellis Hughes a pupil from Ysgol Gynradd Llanfair-ym-Muallt. The hand-drawn card shows a large Welsh dragon surrounded by falling snow, a snowman and Father Christmas flying above.

The winning entry will now be used as the official Christmas card which will be sent to dignitaries across the world including Her Majesty the Queen and the Prime Minister

The First Minister said:

“I was thoroughly impressed with the hundreds of entries received from all around the country and especially surprised to receive ones from as far as Argentina. The decision was an extremely hard one to make, particularly as this will be my last and all the entries were of high quality Ellis' design particularly stood out for me as it features Father Christmas soaring through the sky above Wales's famous Welsh dragon during snowfall.

“I would like to thank all those who entered this year's competition and wish them all a very Merry Christmas.”

Llanfair-ym-Muallt Primary Head Teacher, Mr Gareth Cornelius said:

“The pupils really enjoyed taking part in the Christmas card competition, it was a great honour to hear Ellis had won and welcome the First Minister here to present a framed version of his card.”

[EU funding to boost Wales' creative technologies sector](#)

The £1.4m project will transform the currently-unused South Seddon building into state-of-the-art seafront business units.

Led by Aberystwyth University, the scheme will create 12 new modern workspaces for the creative technologies sector and will encourage sustainability in SMEs and help new industries to develop and thrive.

They will also help entrepreneurial graduates and post-graduates from Aberystwyth University access affordable business premises locally.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“This is another positive example of how the Welsh Government is using EU funds to support new industries to develop and thrive, resulting in new jobs, products and services.”

Professor Elizabeth Treasure, vice chancellor of Aberystwyth University, said:

“Economic regeneration is a key element of our plans to redevelop Old College. The new business units in South Seddon will lead to the creation of high-quality jobs and product innovation and we are grateful to the Welsh Government and the Welsh European Funding Office for their valued support.

“We will be unveiling our ambitious proposals for the wider redevelopment of this unique grade one listed building and launching a public consultation on December 11.”

The funding for the South Seddon building is part of a larger regeneration project, which will be announced shortly.

[New funding to ensure children with](#)

SEN benefit from the Childcare Offer for Wales

The Welsh Government has committed to provide 30 hours of government-funded early education and childcare for up to 48 weeks of the year for eligible working parents of three and four year olds in Wales.

The Childcare Offer is currently being rolled-out across Wales. It will be available across the country by 2020.

The £670,000 SEN Grant is being provided to ensure the childcare element of the offer is inclusive to eligible children with SEN.

It will be used by local authorities to remove the potential barriers preventing parents with children they believe have, or have been identified with SEN, from accessing the childcare element of the offer.

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“I’m pleased to make this funding available to the childcare sector to ensure children with special educational needs can benefit from the Welsh Government’s ground-breaking Childcare Offer.

“The provision of affordable, available and accessible childcare will support our drive to increase economic growth, tackle poverty and reduce inequalities. It will also provide opportunities and long-term benefits for our children and improve their life chances.

“The evidence is clear that well-paid work is the best route out of poverty, and the greatest protection against poverty. The Childcare Offer will support working families across Wales and make it easier for parents to take up and retain employment.”