

Teachers pay & conditions devolved to Wales

To mark the event, Education Secretary Kirsty Williams has reiterated her commitment to set up a national model that will work with teachers and professional bodies within the education sector to create a system that is fair for all.

Earlier this year, the Education Secretary confirmed in a written statement that a new national model would be formed to determine teachers' pay and conditions, bringing together employers, teachers unions, and the Welsh Government on an annual basis in a Partnership Forum.

Once formed, the new Partnership Forum will propose changes to pay and conditions and address any additional issues, before Welsh Ministers submit a 'final' remit for scrutiny by an independent expert body – the Welsh Pay Review Body – prior to taking any final decisions.

The Education Secretary said:

"This is a truly historic moment for Wales. For the first time we will be able to determine teachers' pay and conditions within Wales, giving us a fantastic opportunity to develop and elevate the status of the teaching profession."

"The new national model will encourage co-operation, bringing unions, employers and Welsh Government together for an equal, practical and sustainable way forward – with the added benefit of all decisions being subject to advice and review from an independent expert body.

"Implementing the new model will be an ongoing process, with many finer details to be considered to ensure that the model is run fairly and is fit for purpose to ensure that teachers are supported to be the best that they can be."

PM must stop misleading the public with false Brexit claims

With 6 months to go until the UK leaves the EU, First Minister Carwyn Jones has said the Prime Minister must stop misleading the public with false Brexit

claims.

The First Minister said:

“Prime Minister Theresa May’s claim that the only choice the UK has is between the Chequer’s deal or ‘no deal’ is completely false – and peddling this myth is damaging to democracy.

“It is hugely irresponsible to force people to choose between a disastrous hard Brexit and a catastrophic ‘no deal’. Insisting the country is stuck between a rock and a hard place heightens tensions and causes confusion at a time when we need cool heads and conversations.

“My government has shown there is another way that would protect jobs and our economy and which is compatible both with the result of the referendum and the EU’s negotiating position.”

The Welsh Government has published evidence based proposals based on the UK’s continued participation in the Single Market and customs union. Securing Wales’ Future, published in January 2017, is a credible, evidence-based blueprint for negotiations that can deliver for all parts of the United Kingdom.

“Only by securing full and unfettered access to the Single Market and by agreeing a customs union can we protect Welsh jobs and our economy.

“A ‘No deal’ Brexit would leave the UK poorer, isolated internationally and more divided at home. It would cause huge disruption and long-lasting damage to all parts of the UK. It is not an option and to claim otherwise is a deception. It would be a catastrophic failure of the UK government that would only satisfy a small cabal of fanatical Brexiteers who are hell-bent on undermining the social and environmental protections we enjoy and careless of destroying our links with our most important trading partner.

“With just 6 months to go, the Prime Minister needs to put the interests of the country ahead of her party and work with the EU to reach an agreement that protects the prosperity and well-being of people across the UK.”

Welsh Government proposes 50p minimum unit price for alcohol

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 was passed by the National Assembly for Wales in June 2018, and received Royal Assent in August 2018.

The Act allows Welsh Ministers to introduce a minimum unit price (MUP) for alcohol supplied in Wales, and makes it an offence for alcohol to be supplied by alcohol retailers below a minimum price made up of that MUP, the strength of the alcohol and its volume, specifically targeting cheap, strong alcohol.

The Health Secretary has today launched a consultation on the Welsh Government's preferred MUP of 50p.

It is currently intended that the new regime will come into force in summer 2019.

Recent analysis by the University of Sheffield estimated that a 50p MUP in Wales will:

- Capture nearly half of off-trade alcohol sold and just under half of alcohol purchased by harmful drinkers, whilst only capturing just over a fifth of alcohol purchased by moderate drinkers
- Lead to 66 (8.5%) fewer alcohol-attributable deaths per year
- Lead to 1,281 (3.6%) fewer alcohol-attributable hospital admissions per year.

Over half of the estimated reduction in consumption would be accounted for by harmful drinkers. There would be minimal impact on moderate drinkers, accounting for 8% of the reduction in consumption in line with the targeted aim of the legislation.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

"The ultimate objective of introducing a minimum unit price is to tackle alcohol-related harm, including alcohol-attributable hospital admissions and alcohol-related deaths in Wales, by reducing alcohol consumption in hazardous and harmful drinkers.

"In particular, the Act is targeted at protecting the health of hazardous and harmful drinkers – including young people – who tend to consume greater quantities of low-cost and high-alcohol content products.

"The higher the level of MUP that is chosen, the greater the proportion of purchased alcohol that is captured and the greater the estimated impact on alcohol-related harms. However, there is a trade-off, as there is also a greater impact on moderate drinkers,

particularly moderate drinkers in the more deprived groups. After careful consideration and on balance, my preference is that the initial level of the MUP should be set at 50p. But we will now gather views from individuals, businesses, public bodies and interested parties about the Welsh Government's preferred price of 50p."

The new law supports the Welsh Government's comprehensive strategy to tackle hazardous and harmful drinking by tackling the availability and affordability of cheap, strong alcohol, which is part of wider efforts to improve and protect the health of the population of Wales.

Currently:

- Just under two-fifths (37%) of all alcohol is currently purchased at less than 50p per unit, accounting for just under half of all off-trade alcohol (47% sold below 50p)
 - Moderate drinkers purchased 22% of their units below this threshold, with the figures for hazardous and harmful drinkers being higher (36% and 46% respectively)
 - Harmful drinkers purchase more of their alcohol in the off-trade than either hazardous or moderate drinkers (76% compared to 67% and 60% respectively).
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£2.7m of EU funds to grow social businesses in Wales

Since 2017 the Social Business Growth Fund has provided social businesses in Wales with a mix of grant funds and repayable finance which has helped them to increase their turnover, boost their impact within Welsh communities and create new and sustainable jobs.

The Economy Secretary's announcement includes an additional £1.7m of EU funding which builds on a previous EU investment of £1m. It will extend the delivery of the Social Business Growth Fund scheme to 2020.

It also includes an additional £1m that will be allocated to a new Community Asset Development Fund. This will enable social businesses to support the provision of local services such as libraries, post offices and community centres and will help to increase the resilience and vibrancy of local communities in Wales.

Speaking at the Social Business Wales Awards ceremony in Cardiff, the Economy Secretary said:

"I'm delighted to announce EU funding of £1.7m for an extension to Wales Council for Voluntary Action's Social Business Growth Fund and a further £1m of EU funding for a new Community Asset Development Fund.

"Building on the current success of the Social Business Growth Fund, these funds will support social businesses to take on or expand community assets, helping to boost the resilience and wellbeing of towns and villages across Wales in line with our Well-being of Future Generations Act."

The Social Business Growth Fund and the Community Asset Development Fund are led by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

100% rates relief for childcare providers in Wales

Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford and Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies today announced the Welsh Government will provide all registered childcare properties with 100% rates relief.

The scheme will provide an estimated £7.5m of additional support to childcare providers over three years. Its impact will be reviewed.

Enhancing childcare provision across Wales is a major priority for the Welsh Government.

Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford said:

"Earlier this year we increased the amount of rates relief we provide for registered childcare providers across Wales. We know a significant number of businesses are already benefiting but we want to do more.

"Today's announcement means that from April 2019, the childcare sector in Wales will be exempt from paying rates. This will help childcare providers become more established, supporting the sector to operate and grow.

"This will help to create new childcare jobs and help to create new and maintain existing childcare places across Wales."

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“The childcare sector has told us that a total exemption from non-domestic rates would make a real difference to their business confidence. We’ve listened and taken action.

“In addition to the significant investment we’re making in childcare, and the support we’re providing the sector to grow, today’s announcement shows our commitment to developing a top-class childcare sector in Wales.

“By providing enhanced support for the childcare sector, we will further improve access to childcare places, supporting working families across Wales and make it easier for people to take up and retain jobs.”

The Welsh Government’s programme for government, Taking Wales Forward, commits Ministers to providing 30 hours of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of three and four year olds, 48 weeks of the year. The offer is currently available in half of local authorities and will be available across the whole of Wales by 2020.

The childcare sector generates an estimated £1.2bn for the Welsh economy. In recognition of the sector’s economic role and in supporting the delivery of the childcare offer, Ministers are prioritising investment to support growth across the sector. This investment is being developed as bespoke business and skills assistance.

The Welsh Government’s 10-year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce plan, which was published in December 2017, aims to professionalise the sector and recognises its key economic enabler role by supporting parents and carers to access and remain in employment.

The Welsh Government introduced a new permanent small business rates relief (SBRR) scheme to support small businesses with their non-domestic rates bills in 2018; this included increasing the relief available for registered childcare providers.

The new exemption for childcare premises, reducing rates bills for childcare providers to zero, builds on the permanent SBRR scheme.