

Minister welcomes latest tranche of international Sêr Cymru scientists to Wales

This is the message from Wales' Skills and Science Minister, Julie James as she welcomed the latest tranche of international research Fellows and Chairs to Wales at a special reception in Cardiff last night to celebrate Sêr Cymru investments and the start of the second phase of the programme.

Sêr Cymru II aims to build on the success of the original Sêr Cymru programme, which supported the establishment of four Sêr Cymru Chairs and three research networks in Wales across STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Medicine) subject areas.

This latest phase of the programme involves more than £45m investment – £29m from European funding streams – and it will fund more research chairs, 'Rising Stars' and research fellowships and include special support for those returning to work following a career break.

Led by the Welsh Government, Sêr Cymru delivers funding from the European Union (both COFUND via Horizon 2020 and European Regional Development fund via WEFO), the Welsh Higher Education sector and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW).

The funding deployed through the programme aims to attract and develop some of the world's best scientific research talent in Wales, to deliver economic growth and high quality jobs.

The overall investment in the programme since its launch in 2013 now stands at nearly £100m.

Welcoming the latest tranche of Sêr Cymru II talent, Skills and Science Minister, Julie James said:

“Increasing our already impressive research capabilities by attracting brilliant new talent to Wales helps to drive up our economic prosperity by creating well paid and stimulating jobs.

“Sêr Cymru really is a partnership approach, bringing together Welsh Government, European and academic resources to deliver a programme that places Wales at the cutting edge of research developments aimed at tackling real issues such as human disease, new energy sources and innovative manufacturing and materials technologies.

“Building our research capacity also makes Wales more attractive for further investment and helps to raise our profile on an international stage. Our research discoveries can also be

commercialised, creating more and better jobs for Wales which we aim to develop and keep here.”

Wales’ Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Julie Williams, added:

“This programme will produce a step change in research capacity and put Wales firmly on the map as a centre of scientific discovery. These young people will be the leaders of tomorrow.”

One of the latest Sêr Cymru II intakes to benefit from the programme is Dr. Catrin Williams; a multidisciplinary researcher attached to Cardiff University whose Fellowship spans the STEM subjects. One of the key areas her research aims to address is how electromagnetic fields interact with biological systems.

Explaining what this means and why she was keen to get involved with Sêr Cymru II, Catrin said:

“My area of work – examining how electromagnetic fields interact with biological systems – put simply is about looking at the impact microwaves (found in common devices such as mobile phones, Wi-Fi and microwave ovens to more advanced equipment such as those used in hospitals for treating cancers and heart diseases) have on living things.

“Some of the current impacts these appliances have on us are quite obvious, for example improved communications, faster cooking times and more effective medical treatments. What are less obvious are the hidden or longer term impacts these microwaves might be having on us, such as potential molecular changes in our cellular make-up.”

Dr. Williams continued:

“These potential changes may be positive or negative, leading to therapeutic or destructive outcomes. Even destructive changes may lead to positive results, for example a better understanding of the risks associated with microwaves and how these can be minimised or avoided. Additionally, we can also look at how potential destructive outcomes can be used to our advantage, such as in the development of new technologies and treatments that lead to the more efficient and effective removal or avoidance of cancers and some cardiac diseases.

“At this point we simply don’t know what opportunities and challenges microwaves present and this is why this area of research is so exciting and important.”

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The number of school pupils in Scotland requiring additional support has more than doubled in six years, a report to Holyrood's education committee will reveal on Wednesday.

The report will show that the total number of pupils in need of additional support has seen a sharp 153 per cent rise since 2010.

Among the highest number of additional support was the need for social, emotional and behavioural difficulty assistance.

A total of 36,030 students have been revealed to require this form of support, a striking increase from 1 per 1,000 students to 4.1 per 1,000 since 2002.

The report also reveals that 2,044 young carers required additional support during 2016.

The worrying statistics have intensified criticism of the SNP on additional support needs, after a report released in January revealed that the 2,896 additional support teachers employed was the lowest since 2007.

With these figures revealing the ever-increasing demand for additional support teachers across Scotland, the Scottish Conservatives are now calling for answers from the SNP as to why it has continually slashed the number of support teachers.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"The SNP has repeatedly declared that education is a major priority, but its actions suggest otherwise.

"The growth in the number of pupils being identified with additional support needs has been accompanied by a fall in the number of teachers with the relevant specialist skills.

"Because of this fall in additional support teachers, many pupils are being badly let down.

“There is a very important debate to be had about the effectiveness of mainstreaming for some of our most vulnerable children, but that will not happen if there are too few teachers with the relevant skills.”

Copy of the education report papers:

http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Meeting%20Papers/ESCtteePublicPapers20170301.pdf

[Press release: British tech booms on global stage at Mobile World Congress](#)

A record 167 UK tech companies are flying the flag for Britain this week at the annual Mobile World Congress (MWC) in a bid to attract global business partners, helped by Government support.

They join firms from over 200 countries at the largest ever gathering of over 100,000 tech professionals, entrepreneurs and investors from global tech giants like Samsung and Huawei to new start-ups. With one of the largest national presences the UK, through DIT, is helping small firms across the country showcase their ideas abroad.

Of the bumper delegation travelling to Barcelona from across the UK, 58 companies who secured government financial support are representing regions such as Devon, Manchester and Staffordshire, with 17 from Scotland alone.

Speaking at the event, International Trade Minister Greg Hands said:

The world continues to see the UK as a leading technology destination of choice, with global tech companies such as Facebook, Apple and Google leading the charge to invest in Silicon UK.

We have some of the most innovative tech talent and entrepreneurs in the world, and I want to encourage other investors to take notice and take advantage of our expertise and ideas. Global industry shows, like Mobile World Congress, are a huge opportunity for small businesses, and my department is here helping more UK companies than ever build the connections they need to revolutionise the world and go global.

The UK's tech sector attracts more international inward investment than the

rest of Europe combined with 25% of all overseas inward investment into Europe coming to the UK. Over 348,000 people work in UK telecomms and related software development.

DIT is working with 75 UK firms at Mobile World Congress to showcase their products and ideas and match them with potential partners and investors through meetings at the conference. This follows the continued commitment of global brands to the UK, with Snapchat choosing the UK for its new international HQ, and Google and Facebook both increasing their staff here.

With worldwide mobile data traffic expected to increase a hundredfold in the next 5 years, as more people get online, the government is helping UK firms seize an increasing global market.

Companies DIT is supporting include What3Words which offers national postal services and aid agencies a pinpoint accurate global address system. Its revolutionary mapping system has also been nominated for 2 Global Mobile Awards being announced out at MWC.

Giles Rhys Jones, Director at What3Words said:

MWC is a fantastic platform to reach potential partners, investors and influencers, and the support we have received from the Department for International Trade to help us get here has been fantastic.

[Wales should continue reforms to boost quality and equity of school system](#)

28/02/2017 – Wales should continue its efforts to reform the curriculum and raise the standards of teaching in order to improve the quality and equity of its school system, according to a new OECD report.

[The Welsh Education Reform Journey](#) analyses the reforms adopted since 2014 and notes a shift in the approach to school improvement away from a piecemeal and short-term policy orientation to one with a long-term vision involving key stakeholders.

The commitment to improving the teaching and learning in Wales's schools is visible at all levels of the education system, says the report.

“Sustaining this commitment, deepening investments in key policy areas and strengthening the implementation process will be central to realising the

country's ambitions for education and society over the long term," said Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills, launching the report in Cardiff with Kirsty Williams, Wales' Cabinet Secretary for Education.

The focus of continuing reforms should be on developing a high-quality teaching profession, making leadership a key driver of education reform, ensuring equity in learning opportunities and student well-being, and moving towards a new system of assessment, evaluation and accountability that aligns with the new 21st century curriculum.

Among the report's recommendations are that Wales should:

- Continue developing a national approach to professional learning and build capacity for implementation of the new curriculum.
- Move forward with the establishment of the National Academy of Educational Leadership and speed up development of leadership standards.
- Consider moving towards a national needs-based school-funding formula that ensures the effective allocation of funds to schools.
- Continue strengthening Wales' school improvement infrastructure.
- Ensure coherence across the various reform initiatives to prevent fragmentation. The government should clarify how different reforms and policies relate to each other as well as the roles and responsibilities of teachers, school leaders, local authorities and regional consortia.

The report is available at

<http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/thewelshededucationreformjourneyarapidpolicyassessment.htm>

For more information, or to speak to the report's author, journalists should contact [Spencer Wilson](#) of the [OECD's Media Division](#) (tel. + 33 1 45 24 81 18).

[Xi stresses stability, progress in China's economic work](#)

China will stick to the basic tone of "seeking progress while maintaining stability" in this year's economic work to ensure stable and healthy development, Chinese President Xi Jinping said Tuesday.

"China will strive to improve the quality and efficiency of the economy and deepen supply-side structural reform," Xi said at a meeting of the Central Leading Group on Finance and Economic Affairs.

It was the 15th conference of the leading group, which is headed by Xi. Premier Li Keqiang, the deputy head, also attended the meeting.

The country's economic regulators reported their work plans in excess capacity cutting, financial risk control, property market regulation and the revival of the manufacturing sector.

After hearing the reports, Xi highlighted the handling of loss-making "zombie companies" in excess capacity cutting.

"The government should make more efforts to guarantee subsistence allowance and re-employment for those laid-off, and grab effective methods to dissolve corporate debts and prevent moral hazard," Xi said. "China will accelerate building a supervision coordination mechanism and strengthen macro-prudential regulation to prevent systemic risks."

He also pointed out the role that financial supervision could play in improving the economy.

"Financial supervisors should fix weak links and act hard against illegal activities," he said, calling for reform and innovation to help the financial sector better serve the real economy.

"Houses are built to be lived in, not for speculation," Xi said, when making instructions on house market regulation.

"A long-term mechanism will be established to ensure market stability, with improved policies to stabilize home buying, guide market expectations and enhance land supply systems," Xi said.

Xi stressed quality in reviving the manufacturing sector, saying the sector should shift from the expansion of quantity to the improvement of quality.

"China will channel more energy into reducing prices and administrative fees in monopolized sectors, and strive to lower business burdens," Xi added.

During the meeting, policymakers discussed the work report of the leading group, which has rolled out more than 400 measures to improve economic regulation since 2012.