

Destination Qatar

Welsh companies looking to build their trade links with the Middle East will be among the first to capitalise on the new daily flights between Cardiff and Doha which begin this week.

First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, who will be on tomorrow's inaugural Qatar Airways flight from Doha to Cardiff, has announced that a trade mission of ten Welsh companies will be heading to Qatar later this week (5-11 May) to capitalise on the new links.

The companies taking part in the trade mission to Qatar are:

- AmniTec
- Axiom Process
- Calon Wen Organic Dairy Produce
- Catnic – Tata Steel UK.
- Penfro Consultancy
- Rachel's Dairy
- Rhug Organic Farm
- Site Heat – Treatment Services
- Teddington Engineered Solutions
- University of Wales Trinity Saint David

The trade mission provides an opportunity to strengthen and build ties with prospective partners and investors both independently and through Welsh Government organised business receptions and events.

Speaking ahead of his trip to Doha, the First Minister said:

“The new direct service between Cardiff and Doha has the potential to deliver exciting new economic opportunities for Welsh businesses looking to do trade with the Middle East, India, China, Singapore and Australasia. This trade mission demonstrates the appetite there is among Welsh businesses to make the most of this new global trade link and show the world exactly what they have to offer.

“This week marks the result of two years of hard work – with Welsh Government and Cardiff Airport working together to put forward an attractive proposal to bring this service to Wales. The direct flight opens up the prospect of further investment, and the Welsh Government will continue to maximise opportunities to raise Wales' profile in new global markets – this week's trade mission is just the beginning.”

The Economy and Transport Secretary said:

“The direct service between Cardiff and Doha is an exciting opportunity for Wales, providing a direct route to and from the world's fastest growing hub

airport, Hamad International.

“From the construction and energy supply chain to food and drink, there are a number of Wales based companies already active in Qatar, whilst Qatar Petroleum is the major shareholder in South Hook, one of the largest liquefied natural gas terminals in Europe, in Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire. This link provides further opportunities for both nations to build on these ties and act as a further catalyst for trade, investment and partnership.

“This trade mission will build on recent visits by both myself and the First Minister and will be followed by a specific food and drink trade development visit later in the year. This is all in addition to the recently announced marketing partnership agreement with Qatar Airways which will increase Wales’ visibility in key markets as a holiday and business destination.

“It’s a fantastic opportunity for some of our finest Welsh companies to showcase exactly what they have to offer a key market and I look forward to continuing to work with them and companies across Wales to ensure they are fully equipped to capitalise on these links.”

[Third Menai Crossing electricity connection to be examined](#)

National Grid is currently developing plans for a new 400,000 volt connection between the existing substation at Wylfa on Anglesey and the existing electricity transmission network on the mainland in North Wales. The project is known as the North Wales Connection Project and will also facilitate the export of power from the proposed Wylfa Newydd power station.

The joint study between the Welsh Government and National Grid will look at any potential opportunities between the North Wales Connection Project and the Welsh Government’s proposed third crossing utilising the bridge to house National Grid infrastructure in order to cross the Menai Strait.

Should there be a feasible solution, the study will look at timelines for delivery and also assess if it provides the best value. National Grid has an agreement with Horizon to provide the connection to Wylfa Newydd by the mid 2020s.

The feasibility study agreement will be funded through the £3m design and development stage of the third crossing which is part of the two-year budget

agreed by the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

The consultation looking at four possible options for a third Menai crossing closed on 9 March and all responses are currently being evaluated.

Economy and Transport Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“The Welsh Government has made known its ambition for a shared third Menai Crossing and this feasibility study will now examine in detail the potential opportunities, challenges and obstacles to making that vision a reality.

“Any solution must of course be fit for purpose, not only to deliver a safe electricity connection but to protect the environment around it and provide the best value for money for the taxpayer.

“We have held constructive discussions with National Grid to explore if a third Menai crossing could be utilised to carry power onto the national grid, including from the proposed Wylfa Newydd, and today’s announcement is a step forward establishing if this is possible.

“The third Menai Crossing is a huge investment project which has the potential to make a big difference in supporting the needs of communities and visitors, tackling congestion issues and providing a boost to the economy.

“The Welsh Government has an ambitious programme for transport improvements over the coming years and a third crossing over the Menai Strait is a key part of our plans.”

Gareth Williams, Senior Project Manager, National Grid said:

“We are pleased to be working with Welsh Government to look at the possibility of placing cables to connect Wylfa Newydd over the proposed third crossing of the Menai Strait. The project could present challenges in terms of construction programme, cost and technical delivery and we will examine these to see if they can be overcome.

“In tandem, we’ll continue to move ahead with our current plans for a tunnel as our customer, Horizon requires a connection by the mid 2020s. It will be vital that we deliver a reliable connection on time to unlock the billions of pounds of investment Wylfa Newydd will bring for North Wales.”

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[Finance Secretary announces £260m for infrastructure investment](#)

The funding announcement comes as the Finance Secretary will publish a mid-point review of the Welsh Infrastructure and Investment Plan, which highlights how the Welsh Government has invested £9bn in new hospitals, schools, houses and transport links since 2012, in the face of ongoing austerity.

The new capital will fund a range of infrastructure investments, including active travel, next generation broadband, the NHS all-Wales capital programme, school community hubs throughout Wales and the Tech Valleys programme, which is part of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys and the Economic Action Plan.

Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“I am pleased to announce this additional capital funding, which will help us to continue to deliver ambitious infrastructure projects throughout Wales.

“Our aim is to ensure our infrastructure investment contributes to the growing Welsh economy and helps to deliver prosperity for all.”

Speaking about the mid-point review of the Welsh Infrastructure and Investment Plan (WIIP), which will be published Tuesday May 1, he added:

“The mid-point review is an opportunity to look back at what we’ve achieved since the WIIP was published in 2012. But it also provides a timely opportunity to consider the future direction of our infrastructure investment.”

Since the publication of the WIIP in 2012, the Welsh Government has invested £9bn of capital funding in infrastructure in Wales and developed new innovative finance initiatives, including the new Mutual Investment Model, to complement conventional capital funding.

The £266m of new capital will build on this work and help to meet the needs of present and future generations. The investment is aligned to the commitments in the programme for government Taking Wales Forward and Prosperity for All.

Kirsty Williams steps in with £200,000 to support armed forces children

Up until March this year schools in Wales were able to bid for funding from the MoD’s Education Support Fund (ESF) which was open to schools across the UK and provided targeted support for Service children.

As the fund has now come to an end, a new interim £200,000 Supporting Service Children in Wales Fund will be established. This will be administered by the Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Project and hosted by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

Schools are being invited to bid this term for funding ready for the new term in September.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Our national mission is to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence. For this to happen, every learner in Wales must be able to achieve their full potential.

“Service children often have to move schools at very short notice, and can also face the anxiety of having a parent away on active service. That’s why we need to ensure schools are there to support them.”

Alun Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government & Public Services, said:

“We have made tremendous progress in Wales in delivering services and support for our Armed Forces community and stepping up to help the children of active personnel through what can clearly be a stressful time in their life is further evidence of our commitment.

“The WLGA is particularly well suited to manage the fund with the SSCE as they already have the links with schools and the Armed Forces in Wales.

“They will be making sure that schools are fully aware of the new fund and will be inviting them to submit their bids so that the funding is in place ready for September.”

Councillor Debbie Wilcox, WLGA Spokesperson for Education, said:

“The unique stresses and anxieties that Service children face can often be overwhelming especially in a learning environment. That is why the SSCE Project continues to work positively with relevant stakeholders, raising awareness of the issues of service children in education and supporting schools working with these children and young people across Wales.”

“This interim Welsh Government fund for 2018-19, administered by SSCE and hosted by WLGA, will ensure that the children of our armed forces are given the additional support that they need to fulfil their potential at school. WLGA and Welsh Government are committed to reduce the attainment gap and to provide an education system which prepares all learners in Wales for bright futures. As we look ahead, it is imperative that long-term government funding is secured for future years to ensure that children of all backgrounds are given the best possible opportunities to thrive.”

Ant Metcalfe, Wales Area Manager for The Royal British Legion said:

“Having a parent in the Armed Forces can have a tremendous impact on the wellbeing of some service children. We welcome any additional support that benefits the children of Armed Forces personnel in Wales and helps them gain access to the help they need due to their unique circumstances.

“In October 2017 the Legion launched a guide for Service children and families in Wales to improve awareness of the support available to them and we hope the establishment of this fund will further increase the help available for service children across Wales’.