

School business managers playing vital role in reducing headteachers' workload – Kirsty Williams

Speaking at the Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL) conference in Cardiff's City Hall, the Education Secretary said:

"Teachers and headteachers need to be able to concentrate on the roles that they are best equipped to perform, roles that they trained for, roles that made them want to become teachers in the first place.

"There are many things that can get in the way of this and teachers frequently tell me about the pressures they face due to workload.

"We have listened and that's why, last year, I announced funding of £642,000 for the School Business Manager project.

"Coupled with match-funding from Local Authorities this means that over £1.2 million is available for pilots in eleven areas.

"The aim of the project is to help headteachers manage their workload and focus on raising standards and school improvement.

"The pilots are currently supporting over 100 schools with dedicated support for headteachers and teachers."

"We are already seeing encouraging results with business managers freeing up headteachers' time by working on areas such as HR, Finance, Audit, Facilities Management and Procurement issues."

The Education Secretary added:."

"Reducing the administrative burden on headteachers is just one of the measures we're taking to strengthen the profession.

"Teachers also tell me about the problems they face teaching large class sizes. Therefore, over this Assembly term, we will be making £36m available to reduce infant class sizes.

"New professional teacher and leadership standards have also been developed with the profession, for the profession and a National Academy for Educational Leadership is being set up to support all leaders in education at all stages of their careers.

"These measures, coupled with our efforts to reduce workload, form a key part of our national mission to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and public confidence."

Environment Minister announces £600,000 for new Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre

The Minister made the announcement at a meeting of the Welsh Assembly's Climate Change and Rural Affairs Committee.

The Centre will be led by a collaboration between Conwy, Gwynedd and the Vale of Glamorgan Local Authorities. It will be supported by an expert advisory panel including Natural Resources Wales, the Wales Coastal Groups Forum and our universities.

Local Authorities currently carry out monitoring of their coastlines in isolation. The new Centre will provide co-ordinated planning along the whole coastline, improving data and supporting robust evidence-based decision making.

Targeted and sustained coastal monitoring will improve understanding of how complex coastal systems are evolving in response to changes in the environment. It is also used to measure the success of techniques such as natural flood management, including beach nourishment or salt marsh restoration.

The new Centre will collect monitoring data along the length of the Welsh coast, to improve the understanding of the impact of climate change on our coastline and ensure investment in sea defences is targeted at the areas most at risk.

"I'm pleased to announce today an investment of £600,000 towards a new Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre. The centre will help inform future investment decisions on a national basis, helping reduce the risk to our coast and coastal communities.

"People living in coastal areas of Wales will be well aware of the effect rising sea levels is having on parts of the Welsh coastline. It is important we improve coastal monitoring data, so we can understand better the impact of climate change on Wales's coast.

"This funding underlines our commitment to minimising the impact of climate change on our coastline."

NHS Wales responds to busiest winter on record

Vaughan Gething said:

“These figures confirm we are experiencing the busiest winter on record. Along with record levels of emergency admissions, we’ve seen the highest levels of flu and proportion of elderly patients admitted for many years.

“Despite this pressure the vast majority of patients have received timely, professional care when they need it. I would like to thank NHS Wales, social services and voluntary staff for their outstanding commitment and professionalism in delivering that care during this relentlessly challenging period.

“The pressures we face each winter are a challenge for the whole health and care system to consider and act upon. We provided an additional £10million to Local Health Boards in January in recognition of the exceptional pressure, and a further £10million in February for social care services to support people to stay at home or return to their community more quickly.

“Despite sustained cuts to our funding by the UK Government, our investment in the Welsh NHS has never been higher; with spend per person increasing faster here in 2016-17 than in the rest of the UK. We also invest record levels in the NHS workforce. We recently announced a £100million fund to transform the way health and social services are delivered in Wales to ensure the NHS is fit for the future.”

Mr Gething added:

“Increasing levels of activity have been compounded by the highest GP consultation rate for ‘flu for seven years; exceptionally cold weather conditions causing a spike in respiratory illness; and a 13% increase in the proportion of patients over 75 at Emergency Departments compared to last February.

“In spite of the pressures, 26 week performance improved, the number of people waiting over eight weeks for diagnostics is 31% lower than this time last year and 14 weeks for therapy services is 68% lower than last year, and we expect to see further material improvements up to the end of March.

“I welcome the achievement of the ambulance response time target and the average response time of just 5 minutes and 40 seconds to patients defined as ‘immediately life-threatening’.

“I was pleased to note that the number of people experiencing a delayed transfer of care showed a marked reduction with 51 less delays than those reported in the January period. The total for February is one of the lowest on record. This has been achieved through the resilience planning put in place by health boards and local authorities.

“However, there have been times this winter when patients have been waiting longer than is acceptable. We have been clear with Chief Executives of Health Boards about our expectations around quality of care and performance, and will work with them to evaluate improvements taken this winter.”

[New law to protect Welsh devolution passed by Assembly](#)

The Continuity – or LDEU – Bill seeks to transfer EU Law in areas already devolved to Wales into Welsh law on the day the UK leaves the EU. This will provide legal continuity and stability, regardless of the disagreements over the UK Government’s EU (Withdrawal) Bill.

The Bill was introduced by the Welsh Government because of serious concerns about the UK Government’s EU Withdrawal Bill, which allows the UK Government to take control of devolved policy areas, such as farming and fishing after Brexit.

Welsh Ministers are still working to reach agreement with the UK Government on amendments to the Withdrawal Bill. However, as so much time has passed without agreement between the governments, the Welsh Government had no choice but to take forward the Continuity Bill as a fall-back option to protect Welsh devolution.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“Assembly Members have voted convincingly to back our Bill to protect devolution and make sure powers that are currently devolved, remain devolved.

“The UK Government’s EU Withdrawal Bill, as currently drafted, would allow them to take control of laws and policy areas that are

devolved. This is wholly unacceptable and must change.

“Our strong preference remains for satisfactory, UK-wide legislation with an EU Withdrawal Bill which is amended to ensure devolution is respected. However, we have introduced the Continuity Bill because the UK Government has been so slow and reluctant to recognise our legitimate concerns. This lack of progress is a matter of real frustration given that we share the same objectives as the UK Government – to create certainty and ensure there are no barriers within the UK’s own internal single market. But this has to be done through consent, not by imposition.

“It is not too late to reach agreement – although we urgently need to see further progress before we can give our consent to the EU Withdrawal Bill. These changes need to be made quickly as the Parliamentary timetable is against us.”

The Welsh Government will not proceed with the implementation of the Continuity Bill if satisfactory agreement is reached on the UK Government’s EU (Withdrawal) Bill. At that point, Welsh Ministers will recommend the Assembly gives legislative consent to the EU (Withdrawal) Bill and the Continuity Bill can be repealed.

[Welsh Government invests £6m in success of Cardiff Airport](#)

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“This is clearly an investment not just into the airport, but into Wales.

“Our £6m equity injection in exchange of common shares is expected to increase the equity value of the airport by around £12m. We would not be investing this heavily if we had not had sound evidence that the airport is succeeding in its plan to move towards profitability.”

Ken Skates added:

“When I launched our Economic Action Plan at the end of 2017, I recognised the importance of connectivity within Wales, the rest of the UK and the world, to businesses and people. Clearly, for South Wales, Cardiff Airport is a fundamental part of the solution.

“Since we acquired the airport, it has seen year-on-year growth in passenger numbers, which are now nearing 1.5 million a year. This is a 9% year on year passenger growth, on top of 16% growth in 2016.

“Performance is ahead of the company’s projections, and the airlines taking off from Cardiff fly direct to over 50 destinations including 9 capital cities, and to over 900 destinations via 11 hub airports.

“This, alongside the launch of Qatar Airways which strengthens Cardiff Airport as a gateway for Wales to the wider world, shows very clearly some of the achievements reached to date.”

A range of capital works in and around the terminal building have been identified that will allow the business to capitalise on recent successes, maximise revenue and generate further business growth. These improvements will also help to achieve the desired customer satisfaction levels which should in turn drive new and repeat business.

Roger Lewis, Chairman at Cardiff Airport said:

“On behalf of the Board of Cardiff Airport I thank our shareholder, the Welsh Government. This is a ringing endorsement of confidence in the Airport business and will enable us to continue to grow, develop and serve our customers, our people and Wales.”