

New employability plan aims to tackle unemployment and economic inactivity

Whilst unemployment in Wales is relatively low at 5.0 per cent and roughly in line with the UK, nearly a quarter of working-age Welsh adults (24.3 per cent) are economically inactive – neither unemployed nor available for work – compared with 22.0 per cent for the UK as a whole. [The plan](#) aims to address this as well as setting out a long term vision to ensure workers of the future have the skills businesses will need.

Launched today by Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan the plan sets out how the Welsh Government will support those furthest from the labour market, the economically inactive and those at risk of redundancy, into work. It brings together and builds on several existing programmes such as Communities for Work, PaCE, Jobs Growth Wales, ReAct, Better Jobs Closer to Home and Lift to help people build the skills and confidence to find and stay in work and to ensure employers can find the skills they require for their businesses to flourish.

The plan, which complements the recently published [Economic Action Plan](#), sets out four main actions for improving employability. They are:

- Providing an individualised approach to employability support that is responsive to an individual's needs and takes account of personal circumstances, barriers, aptitudes and ambitions.
- Providing support to employers to provide inclusive and fair work whilst underlining their responsibility to up-skill their own workers. This will increase a person's employability and skills with the view of securing in-work progression and reducing a household's risk of living in poverty.
- Responding to current and projected skills gaps to adapt to the changing needs of the market and society.
- Preparing for a radical shift in the world of work to ensure the workforce is ready for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow such as automation, artificial intelligence and robotics

The Minister said:

“Today, Wales has a relatively low level of unemployment, but levels of economic inactivity have remained stubbornly high, despite considerable efforts in this area. There is no doubt that unemployment levels, in particular those not in employment, education or training (NEETS) would have been higher had it not been for significant Welsh Government intervention but we can and need to do more.

“Poverty is still a curse in Welsh society, but employment provides the most sustainable route out of poverty and developing skills is

a vital part of this. The better people's skills, the better their chances are of getting fair, secure and rewarding employment. In addition, the stronger the skills base we have, the more chance we have of attracting new businesses and growing existing ones to increase job opportunities and improve prosperity.

"There are several challenges ahead of us. Our population is ageing, technology is developing ever faster and the political and economic uncertainty around Brexit means there will be disruption to our labour market and economy.

"This employability plan sets out how we intend to face these challenges not to simply weather the storm but emerge from it stronger. We cannot do this alone. It will require a great deal of effort from local authorities, further education and private training providers, the third sector, employers and of course individuals, but together we can seize this opportunity to improve the prosperity of Wales."

[£2.5m to help adults learn Welsh in the workplace](#)

The funding has been awarded to the National Centre for Learning Welsh to continue its *Work Welsh* programme which began in April 2017. The programme provides training and support ranging from information and advice for employers to online, intensive or residential courses for employees.

More than 4,000 people in workplaces across Wales have participated in *Work Welsh* courses during this financial year, exceeding the targets set at the start of the programme. During the second year of the programme, a range of courses tailored to specific sectors, including health and social care and retail, will be developed. A programme of courses developed specifically for those working in childcare settings will also be delivered.

Announcing the funding, the Minister said:

"BT Cymru Wales was the first private sector company to sign up to *Work Welsh*, which delivered a tailored programme of learning for colleagues at our offices in Swansea and Cardiff. The scheme has given colleagues an opportunity to both learn and improve their Welsh, gaining valuable confidence to use the language in the workplace."

Amongst the many organisations to have benefitted from *Work Welsh* are BT Cymru Wales and Ceredigion Council.

Alwen Williams, director for BT Cymru Wales, said:

“BT Cymru Wales was the first private sector company to sign up to *Work Welsh*, which delivered a tailored programme of learning for colleagues at our offices in Swansea and Cardiff. The scheme has given colleagues an opportunity to both learn and improve their Welsh, gaining valuable confidence to use the language in the workplace.”

Ellen ap Gwynn, Leader of Ceredigion County Council, said:

“The *Work Welsh* team worked closely with us to deliver fully-funded, expert tuition with flexible learning options. The scheme has enabled us to both support employees’ professional development and fulfil a business need to provide bilingual services for our users. We’re delighted with the results and look forward to continuing our Welsh language learning journey.”

Efa Gruffudd Jones, Chief Executive of the National Centre for Learning Welsh, added:

“We welcome this additional funding for *Work Welsh* which has already proved popular, delivering new opportunities for thousands of people across Wales to strengthen their Welsh language skills. We work closely with employers to adapt and tailor the scheme for different sectors and are able to offer appropriate training to meet a variety of business needs. There is a real demand, from both employers and employees, for the scheme and we look forward to introducing a range of new courses over the coming months.”

[Children’s Minister hears views on plans to end the physical punishment of children in Wales](#)

Huw Irranca-Davies visited Pontybrenin School in Gorseinon, Swansea, to discuss the proposals with a group of pupils, the head teacher and other members of the teaching staff involved in embedding children’s rights in the

day to day running of the school.

The school is committed to creating safe and inspiring places for children to learn, where they are respected, their talents are nurtured and they are able to thrive. The school won the Rights Respecting Schools Gold Award in 2015, which recognises achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) at the heart of a school's planning, policies, practice and ethos.

Huw Irranca-Davies said:

"It was great to hear the views of the children I met in Swansea today about our plans to bring to an end the physical punishment of children by removing the legal defence of reasonable punishment.

"As a Government, we want all children in Wales to have the best possible start in life. We want to support parents in Wales to raise happy, healthy and confident children. Removing the defence of reasonable punishment builds on the growing attitudinal change of parents already underway.

"Prohibiting physical punishment sends strong messages that proven positive alternatives are much better for our children and for their well-being. The children I met in Swansea reinforced this message.

"I want to encourage as many people as possible to have their say on our plans by taking part in our consultation."

The consultation on the Welsh Government's legislative proposal is open until 2nd April.

OECD and Estyn to develop self-evaluation framework for teachers

Speaking at the Secondary Headteachers Conference on 7th March, Kirsty Williams said:

"As we develop and design our new curriculum, we also need to think about how school and system level assessment can drive improvement for all our learners.

"We have been working with a number of secondary and primary head teachers in developing a new system of assessment and evaluation

leading to improvement and not a system only focussed on labelling.

“We have also looked at best practice internationally, working with leading academics, and refined and tested that thinking with the profession.

“I am now proposing that the new assessment, evaluation and improvement framework will be primarily based on self-evaluation.

“That’s why I have commissioned OECD and Estyn to work with the profession to develop a national self-evaluation framework, which can operate in conjunction with a peer review and endorsement framework.

“We will then want to hear your views on how we can ensure this works well for everybody and provides a clear picture of where and how your school can improve.”

Estyn’s Chief Inspector, Meilyr Rowlands said:

“Estyn is pleased to jointly lead this review with OECD. The OECD brings extensive international expertise, and we bring our knowledge of the Welsh context.

“Collaboration with headteachers and others working in schools will also be vital in developing the framework.”

Economy Secretary announces Digital Innovation Review

The Economy Secretary, working with the Cabinet Secretary for Education, the Leader of the House and the Minister for the Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, has ordered a review into digital innovation that will also consider artificial intelligence and automation.

The review will be led by Professor Phil Brown, Distinguished Research Professor at Cardiff University School of Social Sciences and will be undertaken within the context of the Welsh Government’s Economic Action Plan, which was launched in December.

The plan recognises the close relationship between automation, artificial intelligence and other forms of digitalisation and identifies the transformative effect these emerging fields are likely to have on Wales’ economy, its wider public service, and on the structure of its future labour

market.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“As set out in our recently published Economic Action Plan I am determined to ensure that Wales is in the best possible position to respond to the fourth industrial age and the next phase of digital and data innovation.

“This review will help us ensure we have the evidence base to future proof the skills of our workforce here in Wales but also go beyond that and effectively support new employment opportunities and drive grassroots innovation within businesses and our wider public services.

“This review will play an important part in helping us build an economy fit for the future, providing us with the most up to date evidence, information and research and identifying the opportunities and challenges offered by this rapidly evolving sector.

“I want to develop the potential of our regions so we can increase the availability of good quality jobs for everyone and empower communities with the skills and economic infrastructure that will support better jobs closer to home. That means preparing now for the scale of the digital changes ahead.

“I want the review to take an international perspective of digital innovation and examine what Wales can learn from other countries and explore how, working together, we can respond positively to areas of challenge.”

The review will work closely with the Welsh Government’s Digital Group being led by Leader of the House Julie James, examining the opportunities of big data as well as the digital opportunities in public service delivery.

Terms of reference for the review will be published in the coming weeks.

The review into digital innovation will reflect the Welsh Government’s National Strategy: Prosperity for All, its Economic Action Plan, and the well-being goals and ways of working referenced within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.

It will work with social partners in Wales and international experts with an interim report to Welsh Government later this year and a final report delivered in the first quarter of 2019.