

Minimum unit price for alcohol to be 'major part' of efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm – Vaughan Gething

Ahead of an Assembly debate on the Welsh Government's Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill, which was introduced to the National Assembly last October, the Health Secretary has announced extra investment in substance misuse services.

Assembly Members will decide later today whether the Bill should pass its first legislative stage, and proceed on to stage 2 – which involves detailed consideration by Assembly committees. If passed by the Assembly later this year, the current intention is that a minimum unit price would be introduced 12 months following the Bill's Royal Assent.

The Welsh Government invests almost £50m a year to support people with substance misuse issues. Almost half of this funding goes directly to the seven Area Planning Boards which commission substance misuse services for their region.

In response to calls made for additional resources to be allocated for substance misuse services, the Health Secretary has confirmed the ring-fenced substance misuse funding for health boards will be increased by nearly £1m, to over £18m from 2018-19.

Speaking ahead of the debate, Vaughan Gething said:

“Wales, like so many other western countries, has a problem with cheap, strong, readily-available alcohol.

“Minimum unit pricing is not a silver bullet, but it will be a major new and important tool in our approach to reducing alcohol consumption. By introducing a minimum price, we can make a difference – as we have done with the smoking ban, which demonstrated our determination to create a different future for the people of Wales.

“I've been very clear, that it will not work in isolation. Alcohol policy in Wales requires a variety of approaches, which taken together, can generate change. That's why we are supporting people throughout Wales to develop a healthier relationship with alcohol, through our Substance Misuse Strategy, and end the sad spectre of people dying from drink.

“We know there is a significant amount of evidence from around the world, showing there is a very clear relationship between the price of alcohol and alcohol consumption. Our ground-breaking legislation helps address that.

“There have long been calls for Wales to change its relationship with alcohol. I expect this Bill will make a fundamental contribution to reducing hazardous and harmful drinking and ultimately, will help to save lives.”

Welsh Government launch first Organ Donation pack for secondary Schools.

The pack, which was first tested with pupils there, will help inform key stage 3 and 4 students about organ donation, encouraging them to discuss the subject with their friends and families.

The lesson guide is the result of collaboration between the Welsh Government and NHS Blood and Transplant, and contains a lesson plan, activities, short case study films and guidance for teachers.

The pack aims to encourage pupils to:

- Describe how organ donation saves and improves lives;
- Explain some of the reasons why people decide to become organ and tissue donors;
- Understand why it is important to join the NHS Organ Donor Register;
- Understand how to talk to people about organ and tissue donation;
- Understand what options about donating they must consider under the system in Wales;
- Understand the decision to donate is their own, and the importance of sharing that decision.

In 2015 Wales was the first country in the UK to move to a soft opt-out system of consent to organ donation. The latest statistics reveal a 72% consent rate and approximately 24.3 donors per million population, putting Wales at the top of the list in the UK.

Statistics also show that 39% of the Welsh population have registered to opt-in to donate their organs following their death. However, if individuals don't tell their family of their decision to donate, the family may not honour that decision and over-ride the organ donor registration or not support deemed consent.

In 2016-17 data published by NHS Blood and Transplant showed there were 21 cases in Wales where families either overrode their relatives' decisions to donate organs, or didn't support the deemed consent.

With an average of 3.1 organs retrieved per donor in Wales in 2016-17, this could have resulted in as many as 65 additional transplants.

The Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton said:

“Encouraging an open and honest discussion about organ donation is key to increasing the number of people who consent to donating their organs, and more importantly, that families understand and respect their loved one’s wishes.

“It’s important that children and young people are given as much information as possible, in a sensitive and engaging way, so they can make an informed decision about organ donation and encouraging their families to have the chat at home.

To make sure the pack worked in practice, it was piloted at Penyrheol Comprehensive school by PSE Coordinator Hayley Steel before being rolled out. She said:

“Having the chance to test something as important as the school pack on organ donation was a huge honour. It’s been good to see the feedback from our session help shape the pack to what it is today.

“The pupils responded so well to the activities; we shouldn’t forget that young people have the capacity to understand and discuss these huge life questions. I believe it will benefit other schools across Wales, helping to break away from some of the stigma that surrounds discussing organ donation.”

Nadine Marshall, whose son Conner tragically died following an attack in 2015, features in one of the case study films. Nadine said:

“I think it’s really important young people are listened to and given the opportunity to talk about organ donation at school and college. It’s also important people talk to their loved ones about it so families are aware of their decision, should they find themselves in that incredibly difficult situation.

“Conner was only 16 when he made his decision to be an organ donor and I am grateful we had talked about it and were aware of how strongly he felt about being a donor.

“He has given an incredible gift and we were able to do what Conner would have wanted by supporting his decision.”

Minister welcomes good news on Welsh passports

Early this year, the Minister wrote to the Minister of State for Immigration Caroline Nokes MP seeking assurances that the UK Government will continue to use the Welsh language in new passports that will be issued following the UK's departure from the European Union and reminding the Home Office of its obligations to the Welsh Language under the 1993 Welsh Language Act.

Following this correspondence, the Minister has received a letter confirming the Home Office intends to continue to provide the same Welsh provision as is currently available.

The Minister has also welcomed news that online applications for passports in Welsh will soon be available.

She said:

“The Welsh Language content that is currently included in passports was the result of discussions between the Welsh Government, the Home Office, and the European Union over a decade ago.

“Since then, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 has given the Welsh Language official status. It is essential therefore that the Welsh Language is considered from the outset when the design and content of new passports are considered.

“I am therefore delighted to receive assurances from the Minister of State, Caroline Nokes that not only will there be no change to the Welsh that is available on passports issued after Brexit but that the Passport Office is increasing its Welsh Language services and online applications will be available in Welsh in future.”

Kirsty Williams cuts the turf at the new site for Brecon High

The new state-of-the art campus is due to open in September 2019 and is being funded by nearly £22 million investment from the Welsh Government and Powys County Council.

Once complete the new facility will boast excellent teaching and learning resources and has a proposed capacity for 750 pupils, with 600 places for

11-16 year old and 150 places for post-16.

In addition to the Education Secretary, the turf cutting ceremony was attended by the Leader of Powys County Council, Councillor Rosemarie Harris, Cabinet Member for Schools, Councillor Myfanwy Alexander, a range of staff and pupils from Brecon High and representatives from BAM UK Construction, which is carrying out the works.

Speaking at the event Kirsty Williams said:

“It is great to see progress being made on this new state-of-the-art facility, which is benefitting from around £10 million Welsh Government funding via our 21st Century Schools Programme.

“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. Our 21st Century Schools and Education Programme plays a key part in this and is the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s.

“The design of this new facility will create a 21st Century learning environment and includes learning spaces that can be easily and quickly adapted, which will also help the school to be able to meet the changing and evolving needs of its pupils and staff.”

The Cabinet Member for Schools, Councillor Myfanwy Alexander said:

“This is a major step forward in the process of giving Brecon the High School its learners deserve. All of us who have been fortunate enough to see the plans for the new building will appreciate that as well as providing excellent facilities for teaching and learning, it will be an enhancement to the built environment of the area.’”

Economy Secretary in China to strengthen trade links

He is joined by 25 Welsh companies and organisations including Aircovers in Wrexham, Cradoc’s Savoury Biscuits in Brecon and Teddington Engineered Solutions in Llanelli who are part of the largest Welsh trade delegations to travel to China for 10 years.

The Economy Secretary will host St David's Day themed receptions in Shanghai and Hong Kong to promote Wales as an outward facing and forward looking nation, keen to build and cement links with global trading partners. He will meet potential investors into Wales and attend a special Advanced Manufacturing event.

He will also meet representatives of the Shanghai and Hong Kong Governments, and the British Consulate and will attend a special performance by the Welsh National Opera.

Ken Skates said:

"I am pleased to be visiting Shanghai and Hong Kong to build on our already strong links with a country that boasts one of the strongest economies in the world.

"Along with a strong trade delegation, I will be extolling Wales' virtues as a first class trading partner, an excellent tourism destination, a diverse cultural partner and a great place to live, study and do business.

"Our new Economic Action Plan is clear about our commitment to prioritising exports and trade, and to helping businesses retain their existing trading partners while supporting them to branch out into other global markets.

"And with Welsh exports to China having grown significantly from nearly £194m in 2012 to nearly £313m in 2017 there is no doubt that it is a hugely significant market and one that has much to offer our exporters.

"This is a challenging time and one when we are all seeking to navigate the opportunities, challenges and complexities of Brexit.

"Now more than ever it is important that we reach out to China and our other international partners to build a stronger and fairer economy for all. This week's visit is part of our ongoing and multi-faceted work to achieve this."