

First Minister officially opens Montreal office

The new office in Canada is part of the Welsh Government's expansion of its overseas operations, which is aimed at boosting trade and inward investment to new and existing markets and promoting Wales to the world.

Canada is a growing export market for Wales and in the year to June 2017 Welsh exports to Canada increased by almost 70% on the previous 12 months and were valued at around £392m.

Canada is also a valued inward investor, with over 25 Canadian companies having chosen to set up in Wales in recent years employing over 4,000 people, this includes Montreal-headquartered CGI.

Canadian companies from the ICT, Financial & Professional Services, Aerospace and Manufacturing are seeing Wales as a great place to invest.

The First Minister said:

"The opening of our new office in Montreal highlights the positive and proactive steps we are taking to increase our presence in key global markets such as Canada, and grow trade and inward investment. This has never been more important as we prepare for the unwanted possibility of trade outside of the EU's Customs Union and the Single Market.

"We are also keen to attract more Canadian students to undertake at least part of their studies in Wales. Our new office in Montreal will help us to foster and grow our already strong links with Canadian higher and further education institutions and enable us to attract more Canadian students to study in Wales."

Currently almost 300 Canadian students are studying at Welsh universities. The opening of the new office in Montreal will help to boost these links and increase the number of Canadian students studying at Welsh further and higher education institutions.

Wales already has strong links with Canadian universities. These include Aberystwyth University's exchange agreement with McGill University, Montréal and Cardiff University's School of Earth Science's Horizon 2020 project with Université Laval in Montréal.

[Health and social services prepared for cold spell, but please take care & choose well – Health Secretary urges](#)

Vaughan Gething said:

“We are experiencing extreme weather conditions across Wales and people are urged to take care, keep warm and importantly check on older and vulnerable friends, neighbours and relatives.

“While extensive preparation has gone into winter planning across health and social care services and the additional demand this period brings, a spell of adverse and cold weather requires additional actions to be put in place so we are in the best position to deal with any extra pressures. This will ensure the most critical services continue to operate.

“It is likely that there will be some disruption to local services across Wales. Local health boards, GP surgeries and local authorities will be providing information on local services affected and I urge people to check their websites and social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook for the latest updates.

“People can help to make a difference by using our health services sensibly. Only call 999 and attend A&E for serious illness or a genuine emergency. Please follow Welsh Ambulance on Facebook and Twitter for regular updates.

“If people are unsure, they can check our Choose Well or the NHS Direct Wales websites for advice. Choosing well means you and your family will get the best treatment and also allows busy NHS services to help the people who need them the most.

“Once again I would like to give my utmost thanks to NHS and social services staff for their commitment and support during this challenging period. I have already heard of staff going above and beyond to ensure continued service. It is because of their professionalism that patients will continue to receive the care they need during this severe weather.”

[£127m investment in Valero's Pembrokeshire site supported by Welsh](#)

Government

First Minister Carwyn Jones, who met with Valero while in Washington this week, has welcomed the news, describing it as a vote of confidence in the Pembrokeshire site and the wider Welsh economy.

The £127m project will create a combined heat and power (CHP) cogeneration unit at Valero's Pembroke refinery. The 45 megawatt unit will provide power for the refinery, help Valero better control future electricity costs and achieve greater energy efficiency.

These changes will ensure the future viability of the business and help sustain employment for the site's 1000 plus employees and contractors. In addition, a principal contractor will be appointed and hold an open day for local people to discuss job opportunities with the project.

Valero's Vice President and Refinery General Manager Ed Tomp said,

"This project is important to maintaining the refinery's long-term viability. The decision to approve our CHP Unit plans by Valero management caps a year of tremendous effort to obtain approval for this major investment in the Welsh economy,

"We appreciate the Welsh Government's support and planning permission, it is a testament to our collaborative approach with the Welsh Government, regulators, and the public."

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

"This project is a huge boost to the economy of south west Wales, on a similar scale to transformative projects such the Aston Martin site in St Athan and the Wales International Convention Centre.

"The Welsh Government has been working closely with Valero in supporting this investment, which will allow the company to grow and compete successfully in a global marketplace, ensuring sustainability of employment well in to the future. This is great news for the site's 1000 plus employees and contractors, and a huge boost to the Welsh economy as we celebrate St David's Day."

The CHP cogeneration unit is the first project of its kind to receive planning permission as a Development of National Significance process under the Planning (Wales) Act 2015.

Valero Energy Ltd is a Welsh Government Anchor company located in the Haven Waterway Enterprise Zone.

Extreme weather warning issued for south and mid Wales – DO NOT travel unless absolutely necessary

The Met Office has issued a red warning for 'extreme weather'.

Advice is there could be long delays and cancellations of many public transport services seems highly likely. Some roads could become blocked by deep snow, potentially leaving vehicles and passengers stranded. Long interruptions to power supplies and other utilities are also very likely to occur, along with damage to trees and other structures due to heavy snow or ice.

Cabinet Secretary for Transport Ken Skates said:

"I'm concerned by reports the snow will be accompanied by very strong easterly winds which could lead to severe drifting. Some places could also see significant ice build-up due to freezing rain from later on this evening, most likely in the south.

"The message from Welsh Government is to plan ahead, take care and do not to travel unless absolutely unnecessary. If it you have to get out – whether travelling by road, rail, foot, bike or flight – familiarise yourself with the latest official advice before travelling and make sure a friend, family member or neighbour knows where you are.

"Once again, I'd like to put on record my thanks to the trunk road agents, local authority staff, contractors, public service providers, emergency services, rail operators and countless others who work tirelessly to ensure our safety."

Wales' busiest year yet for TV and film production

Speaking on St David's Day, Wales' Economy Secretary said that latest estimated figures indicated the productions filmed in Wales with Welsh Government assistance will result in around an additional £55m being injected

into Wales' economy in 2017/18 alone, continuing an upward trajectory for the sector.

Wales' Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

As a Welsh Government we have taken a conscious decision to grow our creative sector. We have been working hard to attract high-end TV and film productions to Wales, and to ensure we maximise the associated economic benefits.

Our reward for this effort has been a steep increase in the number of Welsh Government assisted productions filmed in Wales, and a corresponding rise in the amount of money injected into our economy as a result.

Indeed for every £1 the Welsh Government invests into TV and Film production we are seeing an average of £8 being spent within the Welsh Economy.

Our hard work and investment has helped us to develop Wales' reputation as a centre of excellence for high-end television drama production; as a country that is geared up to support the sector and as a strong and affordable alternative to London.

We have developed an infrastructure of complementary studio facilities along the M4 corridor, providing facilities for different types of production, from film to TV and animation.

And we have recently bolstered this with Wolf Studios Wales in Cardiff which has a maximum eaves height of around 57ft making it attractive to producers of high-end US TV drama productions and big budget films.

The results of our hard work and investment are speaking for themselves. As a result of Welsh Government financial and practical support, Welsh spend in the creative sector, has increased from over £35m in 2016/17 to, we anticipate around £55m by the end of this financial year.

Already in 2018 productions filmed in Wales such as Journeys End, Britannia, Kiri, Requiem and Keeping Faith have made a splash with viewers and critics alike. And with a record slate of productions worth in excess of £500m coming to Wales via Bad Wolf, BBC, Pinewood, Boom and others I am confident we can continue this upward trajectory into the next financial year.

Wales' Creative Talent will also be on show in London on St David's Day as the Visit Wales Year of the Sea film will be back on our screens on 1 March. It is a mini epic of discovery and adventure starring Hollywood actor Luke Evans, directed by Marc Evans (Hinterland, Safe House, Trauma) that offers a bird's eye view of the country's beautiful seascapes and encourages people to

find out more about what Wales has to offer during Year of the Sea 2018.