

Seren Network unveils 'life-changing' scholarship with Yale University, as independent report finds project is 'adding value' and 'plugging gaps'

The partnership is aiming to broaden the academic horizons of Welsh students by giving them a taste of university life in the States. The main cost of the summer school – usually \$6000 dollars – will be covered jointly by Seren and Yale.

Year 12 Seren students have until 13th Feb to apply, and will be selected via a competitive application process.

A similar collaboration between Seren and Jesus College Oxford last summer, which resulted in 73% attendees subsequently applying to Oxford, was so successful that it will now treble in size, offering around 70 pupils the chance to sample life at the prestigious institution in August.

The news comes as an independent report on the success to date of Seren, published yesterday, has found that the programme is delivering clear value for Welsh pupils and raising their aspirations.

The report found that the Seren Network is boosting Welsh pupils' confidence, and encouraging them to think more ambitiously about their university choices.

It found that Seren had been valuable in helping students make more informed choices and providing with the skills to make competitive applications.

Liam Rahman, a Yale graduate who now works as a representative for Yale in Wales, said:

“Since returning to Wales last year, it’s been a real privilege to work with high potential Welsh students through the Seren Network and Yale’s Alumni Schools Committee. Over the past few months, I’ve worked to build the relationship between Yale and The Seren Network, which has culminated in this fantastic partnership and scholarship opportunity. This scholarship will deliver life-changing opportunities to some of Wales’s brightest sixth formers and gives Yale the opportunity to access some of Wales’s very best talent.”

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, said:

“Since launching in 2015, Seren has quickly grown to become a

recognised and valuable vehicle through which more than 2000 pupils in Wales are channelling their academic talents and ambitions.

“The report details the Network’s considerable early success, from plugging gaps in support across Wales, to forging new strategic partnerships between Wales and some of the most prestigious academic institutions in the world including most recently Yale.

“Of course, there are areas for improvement which the report outlines, including a number that we’re already working to address. Nonetheless, it’s very encouraging to see a positive overview so early in the process.”

Lowri Morgan is a sixth-form student from Abercynon who has recently received an offer to study at Oxford University. She is part of the RCT/Merthyr Seren hub. She said:

“The support I received through Seren was so helpful, my degree area is Physics and Philosophy which is quite niche – but through Seren I had the opportunity to take part in several workshops with Oxford and Cambridge Universities, which taught me what to expect in the interviews.

“One of them was an exam practice workshop with Oxford and, even though the exams I ended up sitting were slightly different, the essay writing and critical thinking elements were so important. Then, ahead of the interview itself, I was taken to Howell’s School in Cardiff for a prep session, and given practice with other pupils within our subject area.

“After that I had a mock interview with Stephen Parry Jones, my Seren hub co-ordinator, which was so helpful. Without these opportunities through Seren, and the help from my head of sixth-form, I would have been completely in the dark. I wouldn’t have had the confidence that I had going into that interview, and I’m truly grateful for that.”

Dr Matthew Williams, Access and Career Development Fellow, Jesus College, Oxford, said:

“Seren is a fantastic network. It has been of enormous benefit to its participants, as well as being invaluable to academics like me who want to meet the brightest and best from across Wales.

“It is with the help of Seren that we in Oxford will be able to host our first ever all-Wales summer school in August 2017. Without the expertise and help of Seren, we would never have made as many meaningful connections with Welsh students.”

Stephen Parry Jones, RCT Seren Hub Co-ordinator and Steering Group Chair, said:

“The report is a great boost. Only three years ago, I and my fellow coordinators had blank sheets of paper, and a brief to translate Lord Murphy’s report into some sort of reality. We were initially perhaps rather daunted, but the increased confidence and ambition among Welsh students highlighted in the report are really pleasing.

“I was delighted to be at the Jesus College summer school. As coordinators, we were so impressed by the intellectual ability of students from all over Wales. The Yale offer is another exciting development. Of course, there’s still work to be done, but we’re so glad to see that Seren is already proving its worth.”

Areas for improvement outlined in the report include:

- Greater collaboration across the hubs to ensure activities benefit as many pupils as possible
- More data is needed on the overall destinations of participants, though it was recognised that this data is not yet available due to the Network’s early stages
- Though flexibility is important from hub to hub, there should be a minimum offer across hubs so participants know exactly what to expect over their 2-year programme when they join the Network
- The report notes that a Seren-style model should be extended to pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4, to impact them earlier in their academic journey

“Parents must act to keep children safe online” – Wales’ Minister for Children

To mark Safer Internet Day, the Minister is urging parents across Wales to take a greater interest in their children’s online activities and to take action to ensure they cannot and do not access or share inappropriate content.

The Minister’s warning comes after the most recent National Survey for Wales, published in 2017, showed 95% of children aged 7 to 15 in Wales used the internet at home, but only 56% of households with children aged 7-15 used parental control filters on their internet connections to block adult or illegal content.

The latest NSPCC figures show that the police are recording an average of 15 internet-related sex offences against children per day in England and Wales, while figures from Childline show a third of sessions relating to online abuse are about online sexual abuse, with the numbers rising year on year.

Safer Internet Day is a global awareness day to promote good practice in online safety and gives advice and guidance on the risks posed by new technologies such as social media and how to stay safe while using them.

Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“The first priority for every parent is the safety of their child. Because children are now accessing online content at a very early age, it is essential we equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to navigate the digital world in a safe and responsible way.

“This is especially important these days, because many of our youngest children now have their own mobile devices. While many parents buy mobile devices to keep in touch with their children and to know they are safe, the dangers they can potentially pose are significant. The growing number of children being abused online is extremely concerning – and it is something we as a government are determined to tackle.

“We all have a duty to keep our children safe. There cannot be a great priority for us as a society. So my message is clear – in order to keep our children safe, all parents must act and do more to ensure their child’s online safety.

“The Welsh Government is firmly committed to promoting the safe and positive use of technology to our children and young people. But we all need to ensure we play our part in making sure children are kept safe.”

[Tourism Awards Regional Winners Revealed](#)

Having received more than 400 nominations for the 2018 National Tourism Awards for Wales, 44 businesses have been selected as regional winners which will now make up the [finalists list for the National Tourism Awards](#) (external link).

The winners will be revealed at the Celtic Manor Resort, Newport, on Thursday 8 March.

The categories are as follows:

- Best Hotel
- Best Bed & Breakfast
- Best Self-Catering
- Best Caravan, Camping or Glamping,
- Best Attraction
- Best Activity
- Best Event
- Best Place to Eat
- Best Destination
- Young Tourism Person of the Year
- Tourism Business Innovation Award

Find out here who has been selected as regional winners and will be going forward to the National Tourism Awards for Wales 2018.

Tourism Minister Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

“I’m delighted that we can announce our regional winners today – who are all to be congratulated for making it to the final. We have seen an exceptionally high standard of entries this year – who all showcase the best of Wales’ tourism businesses and I look forward to celebrating the industry’s achievements at the National Tourism Awards at the Celtic Manor Resort next month.”

Celtic Manor Resort Chief Executive Ian Edwards said:

“We are delighted to be hosting the 2018 National Tourism Awards for Wales and look forward to a fantastic evening celebrating the best of Welsh tourism. We congratulate all the regional winners and finalists and wish them the best of luck for the national awards ceremony which takes place here at Celtic Manor. We were very pleased to win the Gold Award for Best Business Tourism at the last National Tourism Awards for Wales and we know there will be many more worthy winners rewarded this year.”

[Major employer in Bridgend to create 49 new jobs with help from Welsh](#)

Government

The investment will help the company as it competes on a global stage, by increasing production capability at the Pencoed plant.

Ortho is a global leader of in vitro diagnostics, supplying sophisticated technologies that test for a variety of diseases, conditions, and substances, and match blood to ensure that blood transfusion recipients receive appropriate and compatible blood. Ortho serves hospitals, blood banks and laboratories in more than 125 countries and territories.

Ortho has ramped up production significantly to keep up with increasing customer needs, particularly in China, and will add a further production line in 2018 with an option for another by 2020.

The Life Sciences Sector in Wales, of which Ortho is a key player, has some 350 companies that employ 11,000 people. The Welsh Government founded the Life Sciences Hub in 2014 to support the sector and encourage collaboration between universities, academics, private companies and investors.

Speaking ahead of a visit to the company, First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“Wales’ dynamic life sciences sector continues to go from strength to strength – and I am delighted to announce this funding which will help create nearly 50 new jobs.”

Paul Hales, Senior Director at Ortho, said:

“At Ortho, our purpose is to improve and save lives through diagnostics. A secure and consistent supply of high-quality product is at the core of that purpose, and we are delighted to be increasing our production capabilities to meet the ever rising demand for our products. We are grateful for the continuing support of the Welsh Government.”

Minister takes the high road for woodland fact finding mission

The Minister and Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity visited a number of forestry sites, including a new woodland creation scheme at Westloch and the ‘Sheep and Trees’ scheme at Wakefield

Farm. The Minister also received a tour of Forest Research where she was updated on their essential tree-related research work.

The Scottish Government has made it a statutory requirement to publish and maintain a forestry strategy and in 2016, the McKinnon review recommended streamlining the tree planting process and earlier engagement between tree-planting businesses and communities.

In 2017, a new “Sheep and Trees” partnership initiative was introduced, aimed at helping land managers to identify the many opportunities woodland creation can bring to support and develop their existing farm enterprises.

During a tour of the sites the Minister discussed these developments with Cabinet Secretary Ewing and Forestry Commission Scotland officials as part of her research aimed at advancing policies and initiatives to improve woodland cover in Wales.

The Welsh Government’s [Woodlands for Wales Forestry Strategy](#) and accompanying 5-year action plan sets a target of 2,000 hectares of new planting per annum. Increasing woodland cover and developing a competitive and integrated forestry sector are key outcomes of the Strategy.

Hannah Blythyn said:

“Not enough trees are currently being planted in Wales. That is why I identified improving and expanding our woodlands as being amongst my top ministerial priorities. Our Woodlands for Wales Strategy is a long term vision for forestry in Wales and we need to back this up with innovative, effective action on the ground.

“It is important we in Wales are outward looking and seek to learn from other countries’ successes. Whilst the land area available for afforestation is much larger in Scotland than Wales, the visit was an invaluable opportunity to examine the Scottish approach and the subsequent successful increase in woodland creation. I am grateful to Fergus Ewing, Forestry Commission Scotland and everyone I met for the warm welcome.

Rural Affairs Secretary Fergus Ewing said:

“I was delighted to welcome Ms Blythyn to Scotland. The visit was a valuable opportunity to share our experiences and strengthen our cross-border collaboration.

“Scotland’s forestry industry is a real success story contributing £1 billion to the country’s economy and supporting 25,000 jobs. Woodland creation is very much at the heart of this success and I have introduced a number of new measures to drive this forward. By working hand in hand with the industry and other land managers, we are now starting to see a welcome increase in tree planting

activity across Scotland.

“I hope we can continue to share experiences and learn from each other as we work to deliver our common goal of planting and growing more trees for the benefit of everyone on these islands.”