

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams explains the National Reading and Numeracy Tests in Wales

Kirsty Williams said:

“Schools through the ages have always used tests to check how well children are doing. In the coming weeks, across Wales, all pupils in years two to nine will take the national reading and numeracy tests.

I want to be clear about why we have our national reading and numeracy tests – to assist our schools to plan next steps for learners to develop these core skills. The tests are not about ‘grading’ the pupil or for that matter the school.

Our national tests have been developed especially for use in Wales so that teachers in all schools have the same information on the reading and numeracy skills of their pupils. The tests take place in schools every year at the end of April, beginning of May.

There are two numeracy tests: a 30 minute test on procedural numeracy and a 30 minute test on numerical reasoning. The procedural test measures skills in things like numbers, measuring and data. The numerical reasoning test looks at how children can solve everyday problems.

There is also a one hour reading test, split into sections and with breaks for younger learners. The reading tests are made up of short questions based on two or more texts. Some of the questions check how well the text has been understood, others aim to find out if children are able to make judgements about what they are reading. Before the start of the test, children can try out some practice questions so that they will know what the different types of questions are like and what they may be asked.

The key to our approach in Wales is how we use what the tests tell us. They provide useful information to add to what a child’s teacher knows about their reading and numeracy from their work every day in the classroom. Teachers can use the results to identify strengths and also areas where a pupil may need more help and support. By the end of the summer term, a child’s school will give parents test results for each test that their child has taken. These reports show schools and parents how each learner has done in the tests, compared to all other learners in Wales of the same age. Of course, any test can only provide one piece of evidence of a learner’s work, and this needs to be considered alongside a

teacher's assessment of their work throughout the year.

The approach we have taken with tests is very different to England. Our numeracy and reading tests are designed to look at a pupils' annual progress and see what support they may need. The test results are not used to judge a school's performance and do not go towards 'ranking' the school, unlike in England where school league tables are informed by SATs results.

I am undertaking an ambitious programme of education reforms, which I describe as our national mission, to raise standards of literacy and numeracy and tackle the link between poverty and educational attainment. Our numeracy and reading tests will remain a key part of the way we help pupils achieve their full potential."

EU student funding guarantee for Welsh universities announced

EU nationals who are currently in receipt of student loans from Student Finance Wales and those EU nationals who intend to begin studying in the academic year 2018/19 will be eligible for support from loans and grants.

EU students should consult their university's student finance office, or the Student Finance Wales website, for information about the support available.

Kirsty Williams said,

"Wales has an internationally renowned higher education sector and it is vital that we continue to attract bright students from around the world to study and research at our universities.

"This decision not only provides welcome certainty for our universities and colleges regarding future funding, but also assures prospective EU students they will not have the terms of their funding changed if the UK leaves the EU during their studies.

"Our universities are central to our social and economic future, which value and celebrate their links with Europe, and thrive through the diversity of the people who come to them.

"We are determined to protect Wales' reputation as a friendly and tolerant place to study and carry out world-class research. Whatever the long-term implication of the referendum result, we remain an outward looking and welcoming nation where we are committed to sharing knowledge across national borders."

Over £1m of Welsh Government funding helps children get a Flying Start

The funding for the 2017-18 financial year will support a wide range of projects from the full refurbishment of Flying Start buildings and the adaptation of empty premises to provide more space to smaller projects such as improving security and IT equipment.

Flying Start supports families living in some of the most disadvantaged communities across Wales. It offers twelve and a half hours of high quality childcare a week for 2-3 year olds; support for the development of children's speech, language and communication; parenting support; and an enhanced health visitor service.

Announcing the funding the Cabinet Secretary said:

“Giving children the best possible start in life is a top priority for the Welsh Government. Flying Start is a key programme, aimed at helping to improve children's life chances and reducing the need for interventions later on. It is one of a number of programmes that help mitigate adverse childhood experiences which can have a long-lasting impact on children and individuals throughout their lives.

“This is why we provide over £70 million a year in revenue funding to Local Authorities to deliver the scheme and why I am announcing over £1m of capital funding to ensure the children have the best possible environment in which to play and learn.”

Swansea based Oyster Bay Systems expands and set to create 19 new jobs with Welsh Government support

Funding support of £120,000 from the Welsh Government's Growth and Prosperity Fund will help accelerate growth as the Swansea based business recruits a team of software experts to develop the next generation of software for the finance industry.

The team will develop new products for Oyster Bay's growing national and international client base and further enhance its offerings by incorporating the latest cutting edge technologies.

Vienna – which launched in 1998 – was the first product of its kind and has been an outstanding success. The single platform supports multiple products, portfolios, brands, currencies and languages and can be completely tailored to every lender's requirement.

Used across a myriad of financial products in both consumer and commercial lending in more than six countries – ranging from SME lenders to global captive finance companies and including high street and challenger banks – the system can manage portfolios ranging from hundreds to hundreds of thousands of agreements in a single implementation.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Oyster Bay Systems is a made-in-Wales success story and I am delighted that support from the Growth and Prosperity Fund will help accelerate its growth creating a number of highly skilled jobs.

“Innovation has been key to the company's on-going success and this major expansion and investment is designed to boost sales and increase its client base, ensuring it retains its market position in what is a fast moving developing sector.”

The family owned and family run business, established in 1983 by Michael and Louise Breach, is based in Caernarvon House, Charter Court, Swansea Enterprise Park where it employs 28 people and will be the base for the new development team.

MD Michael Breach said:

“This is an exciting time for us as disruptive technologies begin to cut deeper and deeper into the finance and leasing sectors. We would like to thank the Welsh Government for this most welcome support which gives us the confidence to grow the business by actively seeking top recruits to be based in Wales.

“At the moment we are concentrating on augmenting our software development, quality control, systems and user support teams in order to balance the current unprecedented demand for our skills and services with the need to continually update core products to stay ahead of the technology curve”.

Oyster Bay Systems plans to work closely with Universities in Wales for recruiting with the aim of providing jobs for local graduates.

Welsh Government to invest over £2m to develop Welsh ports

The Ports Development Fund will support the growth of Welsh ports, helping ensure they continue being a key contributor to economic growth and providing opportunities for new jobs within the industry.

Economy Minister Ken Skates said:

“It’s clear that continuing and improving links both within Wales and internationally is as important today as it has ever been, and our ports play an important role in this regard.

“We want to see our ports continue to contribute on a local, regional and national level, helping drive a more prosperous and united Welsh economy and I’m delighted to announce this new fund today, which will see our ports come forward with proposals for how best they would use public funding to achieve this.

“I look forward to seeing the proposals and to carry on working with ports across Wales to build on the good work already evident, ensuring they are ready to overcome any challenges and maximise all opportunities.”