

New international study pilot to open doors for even more Welsh students

The announcement comes as figures show that only 2% of Welsh students at universities currently spend time abroad studying, volunteering or undertaking work experience as part of their studies.

Developed alongside British Council Wales, the £1.3m pilot – which will run for three years from 2018/19- will offer a mix of opportunities for Welsh students at Welsh HE institutions. These will include study, volunteering and internships, ranging from 2 or 3 weeks to 8 weeks.

The opportunities are designed to attract students who, for reasons such as caring responsibilities or employment, may not have considered an opportunity abroad.

The pilot has been developed as part of the Welsh Government response to the Diamond Review's recommendations on support for students who choose to study overseas.

In a statement to plenary today, the Cabinet Secretary will say:

“At a time when it's never been more important for our students and graduates to be global citizens, we need to ensure that international opportunities are an aspiration for many more students.

“As someone who benefited hugely from time studying abroad as an undergraduate, I know how such an experience broadens horizons, expands key skills and ensures connections that last a lifetime.

“Research from Universities UK points out that these gains are particularly significant for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, it is these students who too often miss out on, or don't even apply for, these transformational opportunities.

“This new pilot will allow us to reach out to these students and ensure that they too can now take full advantage of these opportunities.

“I want to see the number of Welsh students who spend time abroad as part of their studies, double by the end of this government. This pilot is just one of the ways in which we're trying to achieve that aim.”

Welsh Government steps up support to tackle online safety

The Welsh Government is urging teachers, parents and carers to read their [Online Safety Action Plan](#) (external link) which provides enhanced support for the online safety of children and young people.

It addresses a wide number of issues, including safeguarding, anti-bullying and cyber security, and builds on existing tools for teaching online safety such as the Hwb [Online Safety Zone](#) (external link) and [360 degree safe Cymru](#) (external link).

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, visited Porthcawl Comprehensive School on Wednesday to congratulate them on achieving the 360 degree safe Cymru award, formally launch the plan and listen to students about their online experiences.

She said:

“Nothing is more important than the safety of our young people – whether that’s physical or online. The internet has completely revolutionised education. Just a few weeks ago I launched Wales’s first ever E-sgol project which uses video technology, via the tools available through Hwb, to connect different classrooms. This is the future, but with emerging technology like this, the safety of our learners has become increasingly important.

“Our National Mission makes a commitment to provide all learners with high-level digital skills and we need to make sure these skills are accompanied by the knowledge to use the internet safely. We all have a responsibility to ensure they are safe online and I urge everyone who cares for or teaches children to read this action plan.”

To ensure the real issues individuals face online are addressed, the Welsh Government worked with NSPCC on a ‘pupils’ voice’ exercise which asked young people about their concerns. Other key stakeholders including Barnados, Estyn and the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales have also been engaged in the production of this plan.

Vivienne Laing, the NSPCC’s policy and public affairs manager for Wales, said:

“Online safety is one of the major 21st century child protection challenges with children often placed at risk of seeing inappropriate content, bullying or even grooming and abuse when using the internet. It is vital that the Welsh Government is at the

forefront of efforts to keep young people safe and this plan is a major step forward giving children and parents the knowledge they need.

“We now want to see an online safety advisory group of experts created, which includes young people, to ensure that this plan is implemented effectively and that it stays up to date with changes in technology. And it is crucial that the Welsh and UK Governments work together and with tech companies, law enforcement and charities to make the internet a much safer place for children in Wales.”

Leader of the House with responsibility for digital, Julie James, said:

“We want to give young people the opportunity to maximise their digital skills, this is vital for them and our economy. I was very pleased to attend the launch of the Institute of Coding Wales a few weeks ago which will help ensure schools have access to world-class digital skills. But we also have a responsibility to ensure young people are safe when online and I urge people to read the National Online Safety Action Plan.”

Alcohol awareness week: “As a society, we’re drinking too much alcohol” – Vaughan Gething

To mark the start of Alcohol Awareness Week, the Health Secretary warned that while for many people in Wales alcohol forms some part of their social lives, as with most activities in life drinking too much alcohol carries a degree of risk. Reducing alcohol intake lowers the risk of suffering long-term diseases in later life.

The harm to people’s health can occur from either the repeated risk of acute alcohol-related accidents or from long-term diseases. These could include various cancers, strokes, heart disease, liver disease, and brain damage, which can take up to twenty years to develop despite drinking for years without apparent harm.

In 2017 there were 540 alcohol-related deaths in Wales, an increase of 7.1% on the previous year – a number the Welsh Government is determined to reduce.

There are a number of changes a person can make to reduce the risk of alcohol-related harm. Alcohol Concern Cymru's website DrinkWiseWales.org.uk contains a variety of tools and tips to help people continue to enjoy alcohol, whilst reducing their risk.

The Welsh Government is also taking action to reduce alcohol consumption by:

- Providing high-quality treatment through basic harm minimisation and other advice; to detoxification, residential care and relapse prevention;
- Putting in place a dedicated helpline – Dan 24/7 is a free and bilingual telephone drugs helpline providing a single point of contact for anyone in Wales wanting further information or help relating to drugs or alcohol. In 2017/18 there were 5,151 calls to DAN 24/7, a 26% increase on 2016/17. Traffic to the website has also increased by 92% during the same timeframe.

This has led to a number of successes:

- The number of individuals admitted to hospital for an alcohol specific condition has fallen by 8.8% over the last 5 years. Hospital admissions for alcohol specific conditions involving young people (under 25) has fallen by 25.5% over the last five years to 953 admissions in 2017-18;
- Hospital admissions for fetuses and new-borns affected by maternal use of, or withdrawal from, alcohol or other drugs of addiction have remained very stable over recent years. There have been 64 admissions for fetuses and new-borns affected by maternal use of, or withdrawal from, alcohol or other drugs of addiction in 2017-18, the lowest in the last decade.

Earlier this year, the National Assembly approved the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018, which provides a legislative basis for addressing the longstanding and specific health concerns around the effects of excess alcohol consumption – to improve and protect the health of the population of Wales.

Speaking at the start of Alcohol Awareness Week, Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“Alcohol misuse is a major public health issue that affects the well-being of individuals, families and communities. In 2017 – there were 540 alcohol-related deaths in Wales. These deaths will have been devastating to the families and friends of the individuals concerned, but many of these deaths could have been prevented.

“We are firmly committed to tackling the availability of cheap, strong alcohol through the introduction of a minimum unit price for alcohol. But it's not just heavy drinkers who are affected. Moderate drinkers are also impacting their health and their life expectancy by drinking too many units a week.

“I’m determined to ensure the action we take saves even more lives – but as a society, we must have a much healthier relationship with alcohol. Alcohol Awareness Week is the perfect time for people to stop and think before they take that drink.”

[£84m convention centre on track to deliver UK Space Agency conference](#)

The last struts of steel will be slotted into place this week to complete the 4,600-ton steelwork frame as the ICC Wales venue takes shape ahead of its opening next summer. The UK Space Agency Conference from July 9-11 will be the first major event to be staged at the new centre.

ICC Wales will accommodate up to 5,000 delegates within a 26,000 square metre footprint, making it the largest centre of its kind in Wales and south west England.

On a visit to see the progress at the site, Economy Secretary Mr Skates said:

“The work done to date really emphasises what an impressive project this is. The International Convention Centre Wales will be an iconic, major asset for Wales, enabling us to compete with any venue in the UK and beyond to attract and host key events that will make a huge contribution to our economy.

“It’s already providing opportunities for local businesses throughout the construction phase, but the economic benefits of the new convention centre will stretch far beyond the new building itself. Business tourism brings with it wide ranging benefits and the new centre will allow us to build on our international reputation as hosts of some of the world’s biggest events.

“This is a project that will make a huge statement along the M4 corridor about the shared ambitions of Welsh Government and the Celtic Manor Resort and I am delighted that everything is on track to deliver major events, starting with the highly anticipated UK Space Agency Conference in 2019.”

ICC Wales will house a 1,500 auditorium and a 4,000 square metre exhibition hall which will be Europe’s largest pillar-free ballroom.

The venue represents a step change in capacity for both Wales and the Celtic Manor Resort to accommodate globally significant corporate events and association conferences, and build on the reputation established by hosting

the Ryder Cup and the NATO Summit in the last decade. The Welsh Government and Celtic Manor are 50:50 joint venture partners in the project.

Celtic Manor Resort and ICC Wales Chief Executive Ian Edwards said:

“ICC Wales will be a real game-changer for Wales and is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the whole country to benefit from business tourism.

“The events industry is worth about £42 billion to the UK economy. That is a huge sum and Wales’ share of that right now is only about 1.5% purely because we don’t have the facility or the infrastructure. ICC Wales will change that.

“We are delighted by the progress made on construction and it was a pleasure to show the Cabinet Secretary around what is going to be an inspiring venue as it begins to really take shape.”

[Transport Secretary puts forward Welsh stations for UK Government improvements](#)

AfA is a UK Government funded programme, used to create an obstacle free, accessible route from station entrance to platform. This generally includes providing lifts or ramps, along with associated works to improve accessibility for rail passengers.

The stations, which cover Mid and West Wales, North Wales and South East Wales, were recommended by a Wales and Borders railway industry group and are in addition to four previously committed-to schemes which were deferred by the UK government.

Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Improving accessibility for passengers is a key priority for me. An unacceptable number of our stations are wholly or partly inaccessible and this provides an opportunity to address some of those issues in Wales.

Although rail infrastructure is non-devolved and the responsibility of the UK Government, our Wales and Border rail service contract includes a £15m investment by Transport for Wales (TfW) towards station accessibility improvements.

We have worked with TfW to allocate £10m of this to match fund the Wales and Borders station nominations to the UK Government's Access for All funding, extending the benefits passengers can experience across Wales by increasing what we can achieve by combining investments."

A list of fifteen stations have been nominated for a share of the Department for Transport's £300 million station improvement programme, planned to run from 2019 to 2024.

If those applications are successful they will be given step free station access, and will build on the 11 stations already benefitting from previous investment, including Radyr, Wrexham, Bridgend and Prestatyn.

Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

"My ambition is to improve accessibility at all stations, based on an assessment of need, and to ensure a fair distribution of investment in step free access across each region of Wales."