

Education Secretary thanks Student Loans Company staff for implementing new package of support for Welsh students

For the first time this academic year, all eligible Welsh undergraduate students starting university this year are able to apply for a new financial support package that will help address living costs. The first of its kind in the UK, it will support students when they most need it, recognising that costs such as accommodation are the main barrier for those making the choice about whether to go to university. As a result, SFW staff have managed a successful transition to the new package as a new cohort of students apply for funding and begin their courses.

Addressing the staff, Kirsty Williams said:

“As you know, we are delivering a set of important reforms for all Welsh undergraduate and postgraduate students. The new package is the most generous anywhere in the UK and will ensure that the opportunity to go to university is based on academic ability and not someone’s social background.

“This has meant many changes for you this year and I appreciate your hard work in helping us to develop and implement the reforms.

“I am also delighted that, like all public sector workers and external suppliers working in Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government, SLC’s staff in Llandudno Junction are paid the real living wage. Universities across Wales have also committed to become real living wage employers, so we will be a higher education sector that is truly a real living wage sector. This is unique in the UK, and something of which we can all be proud.”

During the visit the Cabinet Secretary met with the Student Loans Company’s new CEO Paula Sussex and also listened in to staff taking calls from customers to get a flavour of their work.

SLC’s Chief Executive Paula Sussex said:

“I was delighted to welcome the Cabinet Secretary to our offices in Llandudno Junction to meet our staff and to see for herself the tremendous work they do in administering student finance on behalf of the Welsh Government.

So far in this academic year SLC has processed around 70,000

applications for funding from new and returning students from Wales”

Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales determines an increase in councillors’ allowances this year

The financial constraint on the public sector and particularly local authorities has meant that the link with average Welsh earnings has not been maintained. The Panel considers that this has undervalued the worth of elected members. To avoid further erosion in relation to average earnings the Panel has decided to increase the basic annual salary to £13,868 (an increase of 1.97%).

The salaries of leaders and members of the executive have not been increased for several years. The Panel consider that holders of these posts have significant functional responsibility. The Panel have therefore proposed a modest increase of £800 (inclusive of the £268 increase in the basic salary).

The Panel has mandated payment of a contribution to costs and expenses for all members of community and town councils. Previously this was not mandated for all groups of community councils, but feedback expressed disappointment in this decision, the Panel felt that any member who wanted to receive this payment should be entitled to do so.

Standards in Welsh social housing continue to rise

As of the end of March 2018, 91% of homes managed by local authorities and housing associations in Wales were compliant with Welsh Housing Quality Standards, an increase of five percentage points compared to a year earlier.

The Welsh Housing Quality Standards measure 42 elements across seven categories:

- In a good state of repair
- Safe and secure

- Adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated
- Contain up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms
- Well managed (for rented housing)
- Located in attractive and safe environments
- As far as possible suit the specific requirements of the household (e.g. specific disabilities).

Rebecca Evans said:

“Every year we invest £108m to support local authorities and housing associations to improve the quality of our social housing stock in Wales and to meet the target of full compliance with the WHQS target by 2020. I am clear that there is more to do, but these figures show our investment is paying off.

“Good quality housing is a Welsh Government priority because it is crucial to our health and wellbeing. Public Health Wales’ work tells us that poor housing costs the NHS £67m a year, so this investment is an investment in people’s health, an investment to tackle fuel poverty and an investment to improve people’s lives.

“I am pleased to see good progress against this target and I expect to see local authorities and housing associations work to meet this target by 2020.”

[Professional Teaching Awards searching for best in class](#)

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, announced today that the search for Wales’ best Teaching Professionals for the third Professional Teaching Awards Cymru has begun.

The announcement was made as the Education Secretary visited last year’s Teacher of the Year winner, Lorraine Dalton from Ysgol Esgob Morgan.

Pupils, colleagues and parents from across Wales are encouraged to nominate teaching professionals from across the country that they believe have made a real difference to the education of others in Wales.

Last year, the Professional Teaching Awards Cymru saw an increase of 20% in number of nominations, with 9 winners announced out of a total of 24 finalists on the night. Categories for nominations included Headteacher of the Year, Inspiring use of Welsh Language and Promoting Wellbeing and Inclusion and Relationships with the Community, with Youth Work in Schools

being added as a category from 2019.

Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams, said:

“I am very happy to announce that the Professional Teaching Awards Cymru will return for the third time. Over the last two years, we’ve celebrated some fantastic education professionals from across Wales, all of which have shown passion and dedication to the education of others.”

“Teachers are at the heart of Wales, setting paving stones for the next generation. We have a duty to raise standards of education in Wales to make sure that young people are reaching their full potential.

“In order to celebrate the achievements of those who go above and beyond for their pupils, we have brought back the Professional Teaching Awards Cymru for another year. Nominations are now open, and we would love everyone to take the time to put forward an outstanding teaching professional to recognise their achievements as one of the best in Wales.”

Lorraine Dalton from Ysgol Esgob Morgan in St. Asaph won the ‘Teacher of the Year award’ in 2018 for her unwavering passion and commitment, and the tremendous impact she has had on her school, where she started her teaching career 20 years ago.

She said, “When I won I was so surprised. I kept saying when I was shortlisted that it is just a job, but thinking about it, it’s more than a job, it’s a way of life. The children are at the heart of what I do.

“When I brought the award back to the school, the kids were over the moon. It was overwhelming to see how happy everyone was and just seeing that makes it all worthwhile. Since winning I’ve done as I always do, teaching and loving every second – just this time with a nice shiny trophy on my desk as well!”

Nominations are open until 30 November, with the winners being revealed at an exclusive Awards ceremony in May 2019.

[Welsh Government ‘Keeping Faith’ in](#)

Vox Pictures for series 2

The first series was the highest viewed drama on BBC Wales in over 20 years. After achieving over 15 million views on iPlayer it was bought by the BBC Network and has just finished a hugely successful run with BBC One nationwide.

Series Two will follow on from where the first left off and will see Faith (Eve Myles) attempt to re-build her life after the dramatic conclusion of Series One. The series will consist of six hour long episodes with the majority of filming will take place on location in Laugharne (standing in for the fictional town of Abercoran) and showcasing some of Wales' finest coastline . Filming will also take place at Dragon Studios.

Like the first series it will be filmed in both Welsh and English with S4C broadcasting in Welsh before it is shown on the BBC.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“We have been working extremely hard to attract high-end TV and film productions to Wales, and to ensure we maximise the associated economic benefits. The last two years have been the Welsh Government's busiest yet for supporting TV and film with high profile productions such as Journey's End, Requiem, Britannia, Kiri and of course Keeping Faith all cementing Wales' reputation as a five star place to film.

We have seen a steep increase in the number of Welsh Government assisted productions filmed in Wales, and a consequential 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 at least £8 being spent within the Welsh Economy.

I expect that the second series of this hugely successful drama will serve to attract even more high quality production to Wales.”