

'We will continue to fight for a good deal for Wales' – Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford

A week on from Welsh ministers giving consent to the UK government's EU Withdrawal Bill, the Finance Secretary will set out Wales' priorities for the future, in an address to senior figures from local government.

Brexit will have an impact on all aspects of public services in Wales although the nature of this impact on local government is still unclear and will depend greatly on the form that Brexit takes. A Brexit which does serious damage to the economy will make it even more difficult to provide adequate funding for public services, while changes to migration policy could accentuate staffing problems in front-line services.

With the ending of Wales' access to EU Structural Funds, the EU could also bring significant changes to investment, development and funding for councils. The event will be an opportunity to encourage discussion about these issues before we leave the EU next year.

Speaking ahead of the event, Finance Secretary Mark Drakeford said:

“As we progress through the EU negotiations, and prepare for a post-EU Wales, we need strong, collaborative leadership with Welsh Government, local government, business and civil society all working together. I'm greatly encouraged by the excellent work which has already gone on, not least through the European Advisory Group, and by events such as today's which really focus on attention on what needs to be done to prepare for Brexit.

“We appreciate the WLGA's strong support for our approach to future regional funding and the call for existing levels of funding to be retained and managed within Wales.

“I know that Local Authorities up and down Wales have played a major role in ensuring the efficient use of Structural Funds to improve infrastructure, develop skills and combat social exclusion. Projects such as Inspire 2 Achieve, Bridges to Work, the Holyhead Strategic Employment Site or Kingsway Swansea are prime examples of this.

“So it's vital, particularly in an age when our capacity to address issues from our own resources continues to be blighted by the unnecessary austerity policies of the Westminster Government, that this source of funding does not just disappear when the UK exits the EU. We will continue pursuing every avenue to ensure that Wales does not lose a penny of funding due to Brexit, as promised during

the referendum.”

Cllr Rob Stewart (Leader of the City & County of Swansea Council), WLGA Europe Spokesperson and Chair of the event said:

“Local authorities in Wales are preparing for Brexit, including the possibility of ‘no deal’, in a number of different ways. The WLGA’s event is an important opportunity to come together, to share our Brexit planning and the intelligence we are gathering on how local services could be affected by different outcomes.”

[Kirsty Williams sets five new tests at Wales’s first social mobility summit](#)

Speaking in Cardiff at The Open University in Wales’ ‘Bridging the Gap: A Social Mobility Summit’, where she was joined by the former chair of the UK Social Mobility Commission, the Rt Hon Alan Milburn, the Education Secretary outlined ‘tests’ in the following key areas:

1. An increase of at least 10% in the number of students studying at Masters level;
2. Doubling the number of students benefiting from the experience of studying or working abroad;
3. An expectation that nearly every pupil will be entered for a Science GCSE;
4. A 10% increase in Welsh students attending Sutton Trust universities;
5. The elimination of the gap between Wales and the rest of the UK at all qualification levels in ten years, and ensure in future as a minimum, we maintain our performance relative to the rest of the UK.

Kirsty Williams said:

“We are taking direct action to open up opportunities and improve the life chances of all learners, particularly those from the poorest backgrounds. But there’s always more to do. The tests I am announcing today are some examples where I am demanding improvement.

“It is clear to me that progression into postgraduate study is our next challenge in widening participation. By introducing equivalent living costs support for master’s students, we will address this challenge. Therefore I can give a commitment that over the lifetime of this government we will see an increase of at least 10% in the number of Wales domiciled students studying at Master’s

level.

“Next year we will launch – starting with a pilot scheme – a funded programme to ensure many more Welsh students have international study and work experience opportunities. This will play a part in meeting our ambition to see the number of Welsh students who spend time abroad as part of their studies double by the end of this government

“It is with regret that until recently we had some schools where the majority of 16 year olds were studying for BTEC science – particularly in more disadvantaged areas. That is a culture of lowered expectations that we must, and will, reject. We are already seeing an increase in the numbers being entered for Science GCSE.

I expect that momentum to continue so that by the end of this Assembly term nearly every pupil in our system will be entered for a Science GCSE.

“Our Seren Network is already doing a fantastic job and raising ambition and aspiration all across the nation. We cannot put a limit on the ambitions of our young people – from all backgrounds. I am setting an aspiration that the percentage of all Welsh domiciled undergraduate first years going to Sutton Trust institutions will increase by 10% over the next five years.

“It is essential that people are equipped with the right skills and knowledge to ensure they can exploit the opportunities an evolving labour market presents. Working across departments and sectors, we will eliminate the gap between Wales and the rest of the UK at all qualification levels in ten years, and ensure in future as a minimum, we maintain our performance relative to the rest of the UK.”

[Access to EU markets post Brexit on Export Conference agenda](#)

At the second Wales Export Conference of 2018 , which is being held in Conwy, the Economy Secretary will tell businesses about the Welsh Government’s proactive approach to helping companies prepare for life after Brexit.

Speaking ahead of the conference, the Economy Secretary said:

“There is little doubt that the impact of Brexit will be felt for

some years after we leave the UK. While we are doing all we can to push for Welsh businesses to have continued full and unfettered access to the Single Market, we are working hard to prepare businesses for a variety of outcomes and today's conference is just one element of that proactive approach.

"Regardless of whether companies have been selling their goods and services all over the world for many years, or are new to exporting, whether they are focussing their export efforts on European markets or setting their sights further afield, they will be able to access support and advice at this Export Conference that is tailor made to suits their needs.

"Of course our exporting companies have questions about trading relationships post Brexit, and we are pushing the UK Government to achieve the best trading deal possible, but we are also working to future proof companies so, whatever the outcome of UK negotiations, they can rise to the challenges and opportunities ahead.

"This week I was pleased to launch our Economic Contract, to help us build a new and dynamic relationship with business. The Contract includes five Calls to Action to help businesses to prepare for the future, and one of these is specifically focussed on driving up levels of trade and exports.

"We know the results of increased exports really can be transformative for businesses and their long term chances of success. We want to work with companies right across Wales to help them build up this arm of their business, while continuing to promote Wales as an outward facing and globally trading nation that remains very much open for business."

Companies attending the conference will hear from North Wales' based companies Ruth Lee, Silverlining Furniture and Air Covers who have seen significant growth in their businesses after focussing on exporting. There will also be presentations from the Northern Powerhouse.

[Up to £160m to unlock stalled sites for SME house builders](#)

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans announced the fund at the SME Builder Breakfast Roadshow at Parc Y Scarlets, Llanelli, an event showcasing the support on offer to small and medium sized building firms in Wales.

The £40m loan fund has a four year repayment term, and is projected to be

recycled four times over seventeen years, underlining the Welsh Government's long term commitment to supporting small and medium-sized builders to deliver homes and skilled jobs across the country.

Research in 2015 suggested there were potentially 7,600 homes on nearly 400 sites across Wales, where progression has been halted for a wide range of reasons, from pre development works and economic viability, to challenges in securing affordable funding. These are known as stalled sites, most of which are suitable for the SME sector to develop. Stalled sites could be unlocked through investment and support at an early stage, such as groundwork, infrastructure improvement or simply assisting with cash flow.

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans said:

"The Stalled Sites Fund provides £40m of funding to address this gap in the market and through recycling of this investment will make up to £160m available to SMEs over 17 years to help them build more homes in Wales.

"We know that supporting small and medium-sized builders has a knock-on effect on the local economy, as they in turn use local suppliers to source materials and skills.

"That's why we are targeting smaller builders at this roadshow in Llanelli. Working with the Federation of Master Builders and local builder's merchants LBS, we are setting out exactly what help is available to SMEs to grow and develop.

"We are committed to delivering 20,000 affordable homes in Wales during this term of government, and SME builders are key to helping us achieve this. By supporting them to develop more sites, we won't just be supporting them to increase the supply of housing, but to grow their businesses, support more skilled jobs and contribute to the local economy.

"We know that many SMEs moved away from house building following the recession ten years ago and have not returned to development. I believe this fund can help them to do this, ensuring a diverse housing sector and more homes being built."

[Show time for Show Dogs](#)

Supported through the Welsh Government's Media Investment Budget, Show Dogs is a family comedy telling the story of Max, a tough K9 officer from NYPD forced to go undercover to thwart the kidnapping of a baby panda and will be

released across the UK on 25 May.

BAFTA Cymru are hosting the event in partnership with Welsh Government.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I’m delighted that Wales’ significant part in delivering this feature film is being recognised with a preview screening in Cardiff. A significant amount of principal photography took place at Pinewood Studio Wales, with the production spending in excess of £4.3 million on Welsh crew, facilities and locations and providing yet another opportunity to showcase Welsh talent to an international audience.

“Released last week in America, the film will be shown in cinemas across the UK to coincide with the half term holiday. It is already a success in terms of its impact on the Welsh economy and I hope to see this success replicated on screen.”

Hannah Raybould, Director of BAFTA Cymru said:

“It is going to be wonderful to see the reactions of the guests and their families at this special event and we are looking forward to working with Welsh Government and partners Into Film Cymru and DRESO to offer access to the evening and celebrate the work of the Welsh crew members who worked in diverse roles such as locations management, make up and the production office.”