

Economy Secretary announces Digital Innovation Review

The Economy Secretary, working with the Cabinet Secretary for Education, the Leader of the House and the Minister for the Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, has ordered a review into digital innovation that will also consider artificial intelligence and automation.

The review will be led by Professor Phil Brown, Distinguished Research Professor at Cardiff University School of Social Sciences and will be undertaken within the context of the Welsh Government's Economic Action Plan, which was launched in December.

The plan recognises the close relationship between automation, artificial intelligence and other forms of digitalisation and identifies the transformative effect these emerging fields are likely to have on Wales' economy, its wider public service, and on the structure of its future labour market.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

"As set out in our recently published Economic Action Plan I am determined to ensure that Wales is in the best possible position to respond to the fourth industrial age and the next phase of digital and data innovation.

"This review will help us ensure we have the evidence base to future proof the skills of our workforce here in Wales but also go beyond that and effectively support new employment opportunities and drive grassroots innovation within businesses and our wider public services.

"This review will play an important part in helping us build an economy fit for the future, providing us with the most up to date evidence, information and research and identifying the opportunities and challenges offered by this rapidly evolving sector.

"I want to develop the potential of our regions so we can increase the availability of good quality jobs for everyone and empower communities with the skills and economic infrastructure that will support better jobs closer to home. That means preparing now for the scale of the digital changes ahead.

"I want the review to take an international perspective of digital innovation and examine what Wales can learn from other countries and explore how, working together, we can respond positively to areas of challenge."

The review will work closely with the Welsh Government's Digital Group being led by Leader of the House Julie James, examining the opportunities of big data as well as the digital opportunities in public service delivery.

Terms of reference for the review will be published in the coming weeks.

The review into digital innovation will reflect the Welsh Government's National Strategy: Prosperity for All, its Economic Action Plan, and the well-being goals and ways of working referenced within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.

It will work with social partners in Wales and international experts with an interim report to Welsh Government later this year and a final report delivered in the first quarter of 2019.

Fifteen Local Authorities' WESPs approved

Local authorities have a statutory duty to prepare and submit Welsh Education Strategic Plans to the Welsh Government for their consideration. The most recent WESPs covering the period 2017 to 2020 were submitted in December 2016 but were found not to go far enough to ensure sufficient growth in Welsh medium education to achieve our goal of a million Welsh speakers.

Local Authorities were therefore asked to re-submit their plans and fifteen out of twenty two have now been approved.

Approving the plans, The Minister said:

"The improvements made to the WESPs since their re-submission have provided a firmer foundation for the planning of Welsh medium education that better reflects the ambition set in Cymraeg 2050, and the recognition that education is a key catalyst for change.

"I am very pleased that the local authorities who have had their plans approved have demonstrated a commitment to support a growth in Welsh-medium education in line with our ambition and would like to thank them all for their cooperation. I am also confident that the commitment shown by the remaining authorities will mean that we can work with them to push forward to agree their plans as soon as possible.

"I will now ask that each local authority draws up an action plan based on the targets within their strategic plan, including those awaiting approval. We will continue to work in partnership with

everyone to monitor progress and provide support where necessary.”

The Minister also recently announced that Aled Roberts has been appointed for a period of 12 months to further develop WESPs to ensure a system that is fit for the future and to help deliver the ambitious targets set in Cymraeg 2050.

[Tourism Industry gearing up for Easter](#)

Surf Snowdonia opened as the world’s first inland surfing lagoon during 2015 – and are looking forward to an exciting season with many new events at the attraction during 2018.

The first waves of the season will start to roll on Saturday March 24 – this will also be the date for Surf Snowdonia’s spectacular Waves Mud and Mountains event, a muddy obstacle course race taking place in and around the Surf Snowdonia site. This will be the first of many events – followed by ‘The Great Outdoors Weekend’ – a big celebration of north Wales adventure on 7 April.

During his visit, the Minister had an opportunity to see the world class facilities and discuss future ambitions with Managing Director, Andy Ainscough, managing director at Surf Snowdonia said:

“It was a pleasure to show the minister around and to discuss our plans for 2018. Going on the rate of bookings we have had for activities and accommodation already, North Wales tourism looks set for another bumper year. We’re proud to be part of what is a vibrant, creative and important economic sector for this region.”

The Minister also visited Venue Cymru, Llandudno where work will shortly begin on a project to refresh Venue Cymru’s offer as a business events venue – which has secured almost £1 million of EU funding under the Tourism Attractor Destination project. A programme of reconfiguration of the current building will allow for better use of the existing space to accommodate the varied line-up of shows and events; with the improved quality of the offer attracting more visitors to North Wales and Venue Cymru, helping to extend the visitor season.

Today in north east Wales, the Minister had the opportunity to launch a new project by the Clwydian Range Tourism Group which has been funded by Visit Wales’ Tourism Product Innovation Fund. MythFest is a 3-hour magical, outdoor adventure, immersing families in storytelling, music and natural crafts with local mythological creatures from the wild waters of North East

Wales. It will take place at four locations across North East Wales this summer. Today's launch was to raise awareness of the series of events among local tourism businesses and to maximise benefits from these events for the local economy.

Tourism Minister, Lord Elis-Thomas, said:

"Following the recent spell of bad weather I'm delighted to see that tourism businesses are gearing up for a busy Easter and have innovative and exciting plans in store for Wales' Year of the Sea.

"Visit Wales's international campaign for the Spring is also underway: with a presence at global events such as ITB Berlin; high-profile marketing for the Year of the Sea in the UK, Ireland and Germany including television adverts starting Hollywood star Luke Evans; and partnership campaigns with major travel and tourism brands. This is all encouraging customers to choose Wales for their next short break or holiday with creative, engaging images and stories from all parts of the country. In fact, the quality of our work is recognised across the UK – Visit Wales recently won second and third place awards at the Travel Marketing Awards, going head to head with the best in the business."

"Last week's National Tourism Awards was a showcase of the quality and variety of experiences which can be had here in Wales – and also showed the commitment and professionalism of our vibrant tourism sector in delivering these experiences and welcoming our visitors to Wales. Of course, we can't rest on our laurels – and it's good to see our attractions and businesses looking at opportunities to develop and grow their businesses to meet customer expectations in this globally competitive industry."

[Funding secured for A545 improvements in Anglesey](#)

The Welsh Government is providing £75,000 alongside £60,000 investment by Beaumaris Town Council and £24,000 from Isle of Anglesey County Council for slope stabilisation works which will help strengthen the road's resilience.

The funding is in addition to the £374,000 announced last month by the Welsh Government to support the local authority with repair costs caused by extreme weather in November 2017. This included a separate landslip on the A545 which resulted in the road being closed for several days.

Welsh Government Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Ensuring roads throughout Wales are safe is an absolute priority for the Welsh Government. I’m pleased the £75,000 grant from our Local Transport Fund will enable works which will improve the A545 bringing greater security to people in the area and helping safeguard the route in the event of future severe weather conditions.

“Developing stronger regional partnerships is an important part of our new Economic Action Plan and I am pleased we are working in collaboration with Isle of Anglesey County Council and Beaumaris Town Council to deliver this essential work.”

Anglesey Council Highways portfolio holder, Councillor Bob Parry, welcomed the announcement. He said:

“This is positive news for Beaumaris and the local community. Despite the County Council’s best efforts, landslides have badly hit this important strategic route in recent years. They have caused untold traffic congestion; hit residents and, in particular, local businesses hard.

“The combined funding of the Welsh Government, Beaumaris Town Council and Isle of Anglesey County Council will allow us to improve the A545 below Beaumaris cemetery and provide a long term solution at this location.”

Beaumaris Town Mayor, Cllr Jason Zalot said:

“Beaumaris Town Council wholeheartedly welcomes the investment of Welsh Government funding which will further secure the repairs and integrity of the main A545 road link from Beaumaris to Menai Bridge and the rest of the world.

“This funding helps modernise the road to support the large coaches and high volumes of traffic we have today, as well as cope with the increase demand we expect in the future.

“We are pleased this collaboration and investment in the A545 will ensure emergency services, school buses, and the tourism sector are able to continue in a manner that serves the locality safely and consistently, and hope the knock on effect will see improved levels of prosperity within the area for the community as a whole.”

“Our children are our future – they must have a say on Brexit” – Huw Irranca-Davies

The consultation will ensure Ministers understand the views of children and young people and that they are represented in the Welsh Government’s discussions and decisions about Wales’ future once the UK leaves the EU.

The Welsh Government is committed to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and takes seriously its duty to have due regard to the UNCRC in its decision making. Article 12 of the UNCRC specifically says children have a right to say what they think when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.

The consultation will engage with children aged seven to 11 years in schools, with teachers/support staff present; and young people aged 11 and over through Young Wales’ network of organisations.

In addition, the consultation will involve:

- Digital and social media resources so children and young people are informed about what’s happening during the Brexit process;
- Young Wales will establish a Brexit Advisory Group of up to 12 young people, drawn from organisations across Wales for four face-to-face meetings;
- 15 young people will be supported to deliver a total of 25 workshops, each attended by up to 25 young people, engaging more than 600 children and young people.

Children and young people’s participation in the consultation will be voluntary.

The consultation will be facilitated on behalf of the Welsh Government by Children in Wales.

A report on the outcome of the consultation will be delivered to the Welsh Government in autumn 2018.

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“The majority of the adult population of the UK who voted in the EU referendum in 2016 took a monumental decision that the UK should leave the EU. As a government, we accept that decision, and are doing all we can to ensure Wales and the rest of the UK gets the

very best deal from it.

“However, our children are our future, so it’s absolutely vital we ensure their views and concerns are listened to. As a government, we have led the way in ensuring children’s rights are respected and upheld. As part of that, we are committed to ensuring we uphold the right of children to say what they think when adults are making decisions that affect them, and that they have their opinions taken into account.

“Brexit will bring about some of the biggest changes our children and young people will need to face in their adult lives, so I’m very much looking forward to hearing their views and to do everything I can to ensure they are acted upon.”

Catriona Williams OBE, Chief Executive of Children in Wales said:

“Our ‘Young Wales’ programme aims to increase the participation of children and young people in influencing the development of Welsh Government policies. We know from them that that they are really keen to have their views heard at this critical time in relation to negotiations over Brexit as it will be their futures which will be particularly affected.

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