

Expanding horizons on Ynys Mon

Led by third sector organisation Môn CF (Môn Communities Forward), the project aims to reduce underemployment and absence rates on the island by supporting people to find solutions to issues including childcare and transport and address them through one to one mentoring and exploring different working practices.

'Expanding Môn's Horizons' will also work with employers, specifically focusing on local small and medium-sized enterprises, to adopt or improve their existing workplace strategies and occupational health.

The £1.2 million scheme, which has been supported by £870,000 of EU funding, will help 450 people and up to 250 local businesses over the next 4 years.

Jeremy Miles, who has responsibility for overseeing EU funded programmes, said:

"It is vital we continue to invest these funds in the areas which need it most, removing barriers to work, reducing in-work poverty and helping people move towards a brighter and more prosperous future.

"EU funds have already helped thousands of people across Wales improve their prospects and careers by tackling problems with persistent poverty and ensuring equal opportunities for all. I am pleased we have been able to support this innovative new venture on Ynys Mon and hope this investment will help build on this success."

Expanding Môn's Horizons Project Manager, Rhys Roberts said:

"This is an exciting project and a major boost for Anglesey. Môn CF is delighted to be able to offer a new innovative support programme to employed people on Anglesey looking to develop their careers. We are also excited about the opportunity to help the many small- to medium-sized enterprises on the island."

In the last decade, EU-funded projects have created 45,000 new jobs and 13,000 new businesses across Wales, while also helping more than 85,000 people into employment.

Fund to revitalise town centres boosted to £31m

The Minister announced an extra £4m of funding in the Town Centre Loans fund for projects across Wales, bringing the total fund to £31m.

Caernarfon has benefitted from more than £2m in Town Centre Loans since 2015, including £73,500 for the not for profit community enterprise Galeri Caernarfon Cyf to renovate a dilapidated building and create five homes in the town centre.

Hannah Blythyn said:

“It’s great to see how Caernarfon has benefitted from using Town Centre Loans to make the best of its fantastic historical assets.

“Ty Castell is a beautiful Georgian building in the centre of the town. Thanks to £250,000 Town Centre Loan funding, the developer was able to renovate the building to create a fantastic boutique hotel and restaurant.

“The team behind Tŷ Glyndŵr used a £60,000 Town Centre Loan to create a bunkhouse, bar and café in a Grade II listed building. These businesses have created jobs and are bringing tourists into the town to experience everything the area has to offer.

“Once the Town Centre Loan is repaid, the money is used again to fund new loans, to bring empty and derelict sites back into use, help businesses to grow and prosper, and support activities that increase footfall on our high streets.”

Town Centre Loans are part of the Welsh Government’s regeneration strategy, which will invest £800m in total between 2014 and 2023. This includes around £250m from the Welsh Government supported by more than £550m from other organisations and businesses.

Hannah Blythyn also met some the team behind Caernarfon’s HWB Caernarfon Business Improvement District, set up with funding support from the Welsh Government. Business Improvement Districts are an innovative way of pooling their resources together to work as a team and fund agreed activities to benefit the area locally.

Hannah Blythyn added:

“The Caernarfon BID has developed some effective local partnerships and it was good to hear more about how it is making a difference in the town.”

Councillor Ioan Thomas, Gwynedd Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development said:

“I was very pleased to welcome the Deputy Minister – it was an opportunity to highlight the positive projects happening locally including the work of HWB Caernarfon.

“Visiting businesses that have benefitted from the Town Centre Loans Fund also provided an opportunity to see the real change the money has made to improve the condition of buildings in the centre of Caernarfon. It shows that the fund offers an excellent opportunity for local businesses and residents to renovate their buildings in the town centre.”

[Veterinary surgeons receive training to provide Export Health Certificates post-Brexit](#)

If the UK crashes out of the European Union without a deal Export Health Certificates (EHC) will be required to export produce of animal origin from Wales to the EU.

This will result in a significant increase in the need for EHC certification capability and capacity in Wales.

£96,000 from the £50 million EU Transition fund was announced last September to support the need for Export Health Certification and is an example of how the Welsh Government is helping the sector prepare for Brexit.

Veterinary surgeons certifying EHCs must receive specific training and authorisation. Usually the training is paid for by the veterinarian undertaking the course, which represents a disincentive to participate.

For this reason a scheme to support the additional training required for a minimum of 80 Veterinary surgeons from across Wales was launched on 22 January, with more than expected to sign-up before training ends at the end of February.

The scheme is being administered by the Animal and Plant Health Agency on behalf of the Welsh Government and in collaboration with Veterinary Delivery Partners Iechyd Da and Menter a Busnes.

Lesley Griffiths, the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, said:

“I am pleased we have been able to support the veterinary sector through our EU Transition Fund. Veterinary surgeons have already begun receiving extra training to provide Export Health Certificates and this funding is helping to address the significant risk to the export of animal produce from Wales post-Brexit.

“This is yet another example of how, we as a Government, are supporting our industries prepare for Brexit and the challenges ahead.

“It is possible— if a no deal is taken off the table this extra capacity will not be required but we must prepare for all eventualities. However, the training would not have been wasted as the skills are transferable and would strengthen the important certification role of the veterinary profession in Wales.”

Veterinary surgeon and representative of Iechyd Da, Ifan Lloyd said:

“This Welsh Government support package offers practicing vets in Wales the opportunity to undertake additional training to obtain the necessary qualifications to carry out animal product export certification.

“This is a key initiative to ensure the veterinary profession in Wales is in a state of preparedness in the event of a no deal Brexit and that exporters have easy access to qualified vets to undertake their certification requirements.”

“We have always been clear a no deal Brexit is not an option for Wales’ food industry. Crashing out of the European Union could decimate economies and must be avoided at all costs. Our preference would be a ‘softer’ Brexit – one that allows us to stay in a customs union and a single market.

“With no new ideas and red lines firmly still in place, the UK Government is simply running down the clock in a vain hope that their deal will pass. They must take decisive action now and act on the majority will of Parliament to rule out no deal.”

Developing a new international strategy for Wales

This will be the key message at a reception held at the Senedd.

Speaking at one of her first engagements as the new Minister for International Relations Eluned Morgan will say:

“At this crucial moment when the relationship between Wales and the rest of the world will be determined – we are keen in the Welsh Government to send a message out loud and clear that whatever the outcome of the Brexit negotiations – we in Wales will not be turning back on the world and in particular on our nearest and closest neighbours in the European Union.”

The Minister will emphasise:

“Over the next few months the Welsh Government will reach out to the public and in particular those engaged in international roles to ask them to help shape the image and message that Wales should be presenting to the world. The Government is anxious to build on the strong international links that have been developed over past decades which will help to enrich the country economically socially and culturally.”

Eluned Morgan will explain to the international gathering that Wales is the most stable place politically to invest in the UK, with the Westminster Parliament in London in chaos, Scotland threatening independence and Northern Ireland still without a sitting Assembly.

The International Strategy will be founded on a clear set of values which will help to present Wales' face internationally – including a commitment to sustainability and future generations, the promotion of the principles of Fair Work and a fundamental belief in the fact that we will achieve more to tackle some of the major challenges of our age -digital technology, tackling poverty and inequality, taking on environmental challenges and climate change, through working together across territorial boundaries.

Jump in part-time students accessing

support following introduction of most generous support package in the UK

The statistics report on the new student support system for the first time, also showing a 58% increase in the number of postgraduates supported. Welsh post-grads were eligible for dedicated bursaries and support from Welsh universities this year, thanks to Welsh Government funding. Means-tested grants and loans will be introduced from September.

There is no Government-backed living costs grant funding for part-time undergraduates or post-graduate students elsewhere in the UK. Last year, the Education Minister set a goal of a 10% increase in the number of Welsh post-graduate students by the end of this Government's term.

The Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, said:

"This is fantastic news and a real vote of confidence in our student support package, the first of its kind in the UK or Europe.

"We have always said that high living costs are the main barrier for students when thinking about university. Our package of support was specifically designed to address these concerns, making it easier for people to study part-time, especially if they have work or family commitments.

"Our radical approach to supporting part-time study is essential to improving social mobility, employment outcomes, access to the professions and delivering on our commitment to lifelong learning."

Louise Casella, Director of The Open University in Wales, said:

"The OU in Wales saw a 49% increase in our October student recruitment last year. This represents hundreds more people embarking on learning that will transform the lives of their families and communities. We've had a 67% increase in students from Wales' most economically disadvantaged areas, a 57% increase in disabled students and a 30% increase in BME learners.

"I am pleased the Welsh Government is highlighting the impact the new funding system is having on part-time study in Wales. With maintenance grants now available for part-time distance learners as well, flexible study has never been more affordable. This is helping The OU in Wales make studying for a degree a reality for those who may not have considered it in the past."

Julie Lydon, Chair of Universities Wales, said:

“We are delighted to see this increase in the number of students choosing to study part-time in Wales, clearly demonstrating that the new student support and higher education funding package in Wales is working.

“In the coming decade, Wales will face many challenges from the changing workplace and advancements in technology. These changes will mean that Wales will need a more highly skilled workforce. Flexible learning, such as part-time study, will play a key role in preparing the people, places and businesses of Wales for the future.

“This increase in part-time and postgraduate study shows that, with the new student support and higher education funding package in Wales, we are on the right path to providing people of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to benefit from higher education.”