

£5m EU funding boost for Bangor University

The funding will help create the Centre for Environmental Biotechnology, which will position the University at the cutting edge of research into how natural materials can be utilised within industrial products and processes.

The investment will enable Bangor University to work on major research and development projects with global businesses in sectors including life sciences, pharmaceutical, energy and manufacturing.

The facility will provide state-of-the-art equipment and world-leading expertise for identifying and isolating enzymes in extremophiles. These are microorganisms that thrive in extreme conditions such as high temperature, salinity, or acidity. The enzymes can then be used to transform industrial processes in key sectors of the economy.

Speaking at an event in North Wales on Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

“Supporting initiatives that further pioneering scientific research is a key aim of the Welsh Government. This investment will create a centre of excellence for ground-breaking research, encouraging inward investment and ensure Wales can take advantage of the economic impact that this rapidly expanding industrial area could bring.

“This is one of many examples of how EU funds are supporting our nation’s economy, supporting growth and jobs, and demonstrates the importance of Wales receiving replacement funding from the UK Government after we leave the EU.”

The Centre for Environmental Biotechnology will also include investment from Bangor University. It will be located on the Deiniol Road site and will form the first part of a planned major redevelopment of the University’s science and engineering area.

Co-leader Professor Peter Golyshin said:

“These enzymes have wide application in many industrial processes such as in the pharmaceutical industry. The project will utilise state-of-the-art analytical equipment which will put North Wales at the forefront of developments in this exciting area of biotechnology.”

Refurbishment work to develop the centre will begin mid February.

Minister praises Newport radio station for Energize'ing people's lives

Energize Media Community Interest Company (CIC) was established in January 2015 as a social enterprise and is based at the Shaftesbury Community Centre in Newport.

A small group of volunteers came together in 2014 with the aim of offering community radio to a group of vulnerable adults, along with young people and those with other disabilities.

The project took off and established itself when Jeremy and Nigel – two adults with moderate learning disabilities – used their Direct Payments and with the support of the volunteers, pooled them together and gave the project the boost it would need to keep growing.

As a result of the project, one of the founders, Jeremy Kempton, after 50 years of living with his mother has now moved into supported living, having increased his self confidence. His mother believes “the project and work done has given him a new life.”

As a group, they have also established a hugely successful school project which has worked with a number of pupils both in the Centre and in the nearby Newport High School. The integration of everyone in the project and the success with turning the lives round of the young people has seen praise come from across South Wales.

One of the founders, volunteer Simon Harvey said:

“What has been achieved by everyone involved with Energize is unbelievable, with Jeremy and Nigel putting faith in the project and pooling their Direct Payments allowed the door to open to so many more people. Many vulnerable adults and their families have feared using Direct Payments and are not aware of the freedoms they can offer.

“We are now working with the Wales Co-operative Centre to strengthen and expand our work, while fully supporting their vision for more Community Enterprises to take the lead in Social Care provision in Wales.”

Minister for Children & Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“I was really pleased to visit the centre today to meet everyone involved, but it was a real pleasure to hear of the inspirational way in which Jeremy and Nigel came together to help establish it, and the wonderful way it has changed their own lives, and those of so many others, for the better.

“It’s a great example of a successful social value organisation supporting people with learning disabilities and young people to develop skills, in keeping with the principles of our innovative Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

“This project has clearly made a real difference to many people’s lives. I wish them every success in the future and hope the Project continues to grow from strength to strength.”

Opportunity opens for farmers to access grant to improve the performance of their holdings

The Farm Business Grant (FBG) helps farmers make their businesses more efficient, resilient and environmentally friendly by providing a contribution towards capital investments in items of equipment and machinery.

The third application window for the FBG opens on 29 January and will remain open until midnight on 16th March. It builds on the success of the first two windows which has seen over 850 applications, requesting a total of £5.7m of grant support.

Administration of the FBG will be transferred to Rural Payments Wales (RPW) for the third and subsequent windows. Applications and claims for the FBG will now be submitted through RPW Online.

The third window introduces new flexibility to the grant, allowing farmers to submit more than one application in a scheme year within the £3,000 to £12,000 grant limit. There are also minor changes to some of the eligible items – an updated full list of items is available on the [Farm Business Grant](#) page on the Welsh Government’s website.

Farmers will still be required to attend one of the Farming for the Future events, which will be held across Wales between 17 January and 1 February. Farmers who have already attended one of these events will not be required to attend again, unless they wish to do so.

The FBG is an important element of the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, and is a key commitment in the Programme for Government: Taking Wales Forward.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“Our farm Business Grant provides vital funding to help farmers invest in their business and improve the economic and environmental performance of their holdings. This funding is more important than ever as we prepare for an uncertain future as we leave the EU.

“We have been able to make some changes to the third window, to improve and provide flexibility to how the grant will work, by listening to feedback about the grant. I encourage farmers across Wales to attend a ‘Farming for the Future’ roadshow and find out more information on the wide range of advice and support available to them.”

For information on dates and locations for the roadshows and to reserve a place, visit [Farming Connect](#) or call the Farming Connect Service Centre on 08456 000 813.

TUI to create 175 jobs in Swansea with Welsh Government assistance

Their customer services centre has grown from 48 people to over 280 over the last three years. The support will both secure existing customer services jobs within the UK, and support further growth of the company’s successful operations here in Wales.

As the world’s leading tourism business, TUI understands it has a real opportunity to shape the future of sustainable tourism.

In 2015 TUI launched their ambitious ‘Better Holidays, Better World’ strategy. The strategy focuses on reducing the environmental impact of holidays, creating positive change for people and communities and pioneering sustainable tourism.

By 2020 TUI aims to be the most carbon-efficient airline in Europe as well as delivering 10 million ‘greener and fairer holidays’ enabling more local people to share in the benefits of tourism.

The company has begun recruitment, seeking advisers to help customers in their choice of flights, holidays, hotels and increasingly, cruises. TUI’s commitment to training and development means TUI staff will be supported in

an exciting and rewarding career, giving them real opportunities to progress.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I am delighted that with Welsh Government support TUI is creating 175 new jobs in Wales. The company’s expansion in Swansea is testament to our reputation for delivering excellence in customer service.

“Our growing and vibrant customer service sector now employs in excess of 30,000 people in over 200 centres across Wales.

“Also, TUI’s commitment to sustainability reflects our commitments in our new Economic Action Plan, which has the principles of growth, fair work and decarbonisation at its heart.”

Helen Caron, Director for Distribution and Cruise for TUI UK & Ireland said:

“We opened our Alexandra House Office in Swansea which is home to our contact centre team in 2015 and it’s continued to go from strength to strength. We are really grateful for the support of the Welsh Government as we look to further grow our office in Swansea. This came out of extensive research, consideration and discussion about the future of our business and ensuring we can best serve and communicate with our customers as we move forwards.”

[Alun Davies in town to learn from new Neath Valleys hub](#)

Since the taskforce was set up, it has worked closely with people living and working in the Valleys to find out what they want for their communities and what they believe the opportunities and challenges are.

Our Valleys Our Future, the recently published plan setting out the actions to deliver the priorities of the Taskforce, identified the need for seven strategic hubs across the Valleys. It is hoped the hubs will become areas of focused public investment and will attract private sector capital and investment, creating jobs and opportunities for the local area.

The Cabinet Secretary has been visiting each of the seven strategic hubs to discuss with local stakeholders the work of the taskforce, as well as the shape of the sites and how local authorities, businesses and other key

stakeholders can play a role in lifting the prosperity of the area.

Speaking following the meeting at Neath's Civic Centre, Alun Davies said,

“This was an excellent opportunity for all those responsible for delivering our priorities to get together and share valuable knowledge and ideas. I am confident that working in this way can help us identify the priority projects which will form the first part of the new stage of Neath's ongoing economic regeneration.

“It is vital we continue to engage with communities, like our partners in Neath, to make sure each of these hubs meets the unique needs of the local area.”

As well as Neath, hubs will be created in Merthyr, Caerphilly, Pontypridd, Ebbw Vale, Cwmbran and northern Bridgend.

Between now and April, the taskforce will be working with local authorities and stakeholders to identify those projects which can be funded and delivered in the first phase of development in each of the strategic hub sites by 2021.

The taskforce aims to ensure that businesses, employers and entrepreneurs are aware of the different types of support available to help them to grow and to boost the local economy.

The Cabinet Secretary said he wanted to close the employability gap between the Valleys and the rest of Wales by helping some 7,000 people who are unemployed or economically inactive into work.