

Economy Secretary congratulates Welsh businesses on export success

The recently published Welsh exports statistics for April 2016 to March 2017 show that exports in Wales were up by 11.9 per cent on the previous year with a rate of growth that was 0.7 per cent above the UK average.

This means the value of Welsh exports in 2016/17 increased by £1,390 million on the previous financial year.

The statistics show that Germany remained Wales' top exporting partner in 2016/17 with total exports valued at £2,978m. It was followed by France (with total Welsh exports of £2,242m) and the USA including Puerto Rico (with total Welsh exports of £1,676m.)

The quarterly statistics also reveal that exporting companies in Wales got off to a strong start to the year with exports for the period from January to March 2017 growing by £150m on the previous quarter.

This equates to an increase of 4.4 per cent on October to December figures and represents a growth rate that is more than two and half times the 1.6 per cent rate of increase experienced in the UK as a whole.

Ken Skates said:

“These latest figures show a really strong performance from our exporting companies, with a growth rate that is well above the UK average.

“Welsh companies are clearly working hard to increase their share of the overseas markets and I would like to congratulate them on their ongoing hard work and success.

“Exporting really does have the potential to transform a business and take it to next level. That is why we are working closely with companies who are looking to build up this area of their operations and offer them the right support for wherever they may be in their journey.

“Indeed in the coming months we will be taking companies from across Wales to a broad range of overseas markets including Singapore, USA, Canada and India so they explore new trading opportunities and agree new deals.

“Increasing the value of exports and the number of exporters in Wales remains a central pillar of our economic strategy. This is more important than ever as we prepare to leave the EU and I would urge companies who would like help in growing their exports to get in touch with the Welsh Government for tailored support.”

View: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-exports/?lang=en> .

[Welsh Government look to update 200 year old Taxi licensing](#)

Economy Secretary Ken Skates has urged interested parties to have their say on the proposals, which will seek to address issues raised by drivers, unions, licencing authorities and the Law Commission to better represent modern practices.

Ken Skates said:

“Taxis and private hire vehicles provide a vital public service, connecting people to places when alternative public transport is not always available or viable.

“There are 9200 or so taxi and private hire licenced drivers in Wales, all of which are currently bound by licensing legislation which dates back to the horse drawn hackneys.

“The Law Commission made recommendations in 2014 about how the licensing system can be improved and, as a result of provisions included in the Wales Act 2017, I’m delighted to now be in a position to put to consultation proposals aimed at delivering a simpler, fairer system fit for modern Wales.”

The Law Commission’s review of the law governing taxi and private hire vehicles made 84 recommendations, many of which are reflected in the Welsh Government’s proposals for reform. They include:

- the introduction of national standards for all taxis and private hire vehicles, set by the Welsh Ministers
- Local licensing authorities able to set additional licence conditions where appropriate and remain responsible for issuing licences and enforcement
- Private hire vehicles licencing to include novelty vehicles and stretch limousines, but wedding and funeral cars would continue to be exempt
- providers being able to work across local authority borders more easily with licensing officers provided with new enforcement powers to deal with vehicles and drivers licensed in different areas.
- Tougher penalties on touting are also proposed (actively soliciting customers), including impounding vehicles
- Local licensing authorities retaining the right to limit the number of taxis working in their licensing area
- Improved arrangements for regulating fares

Ken Skates added:

“These progressive proposals will see improvements to the current complicated, outdated and antiquated legislation, reflecting on the needs of twenty first century drivers, licensing authorities and passengers here in Wales. I’d encourage anyone with an interest in the sector to contribute to this consultation.”

View:

<https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-wales>.

[91% of GP training places in Wales filled](#)

The Welsh Government and NHS Wales launched the “This is Wales: Train, Work, Live” campaign in October 2016, in order to promote Wales as an excellent place for doctors, including GPs, and their families, to train, work and live.

In April, the Health Secretary announced the fill rate for GP training places at the end of round one was 84%, which compared to 68% at the same stage in 2016.

Following the round one re-advert, the fill rate has increased to 91% for 2017 (124 out of 136 posts filled). This compares to a 75% fill rate in 2016.

The new financial incentive scheme in targeted areas of Wales has resulted in 100% fill rates in the following GP training schemes:

- Ceredigion
- North Wales West
- Pembrokeshire
- North Wales East

Trainees will begin their training in August 2017.

Round two, which aims to recruit GP trainees to take up post in February 2018, will open in August 2017.

Vaughan Gething said:

“Improving access to GP and other local health services is one of my top priorities. Ensuring we have the right staff in place in the right places is crucial.

“So I’m really pleased our This is Wales: Train, Work, Live campaign has resulted in a significant increase in the number of trainee GPs coming to Wales – with 91% of training places filled already after round one. I’m particularly pleased our financial incentives have resulted in all training places being filled in some of the areas that have traditionally found it difficult to recruit.”

The Health Secretary added:

“We’re continuing to reform our primary care services – with GPs working with pharmacists, nurses, therapists and other professionals as part of a wider team to ensure people receive the right care, at the right time, by the right person, as locally as possible. We are committed to working with our staff to develop the local healthcare team for the future.

“People’s access to these services will increasingly improve as we recruit more GPs and other healthcare professionals to fill roles across Wales.”

Last month, the Welsh Government and NHS Wales launched the second phase of the This is Wales: Train, Work, Live campaign, targeted at nurses in primary care, secondary care and the care home sector. Future phases of the campaign will target pharmacists and allied health professionals.

Wales developing new business events approach

Following on from Wales' success in attracting and hosting global events like the UEFA Champion's League Final, and the NATO Wales Summit 2014, Economy Secretary, Ken Skates has announced the Welsh Government is planning a new approach to attract leading business events to Wales, further showcasing the destination on an international stage.

The Wales stand at The Meetings Show at Olympia (13-15 June) is the first initiative in the development of a dedicated national approach. The Wales stand will include – ICC Wales, Celtic Manor Resort, Visit Cardiff, Vale Resort, Venue Cymru, Cambria DMC, Call of the Wild, Surf Snowdonia and Fforest.

Cabinet Secretary for the Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, said:

“Wales has built an enviable track record of successfully hosting many of the world's biggest events and following last weekend's UEFA Champions League Final – the single biggest sporting event of 2017 – we're now looking at building on our experience to attract leading business events to Wales.

“Wales currently attracts under 2% of the value of business conferences and meetings for the UK as a whole but there is significant potential to draw events from UK and international associations, public & third sector meetings, corporate meetings and team building events to Wales's award-winning venues and business destinations.

“A small dedicated team will be set up with their main goal to attract events aligned with Wales' key sectors and growth regions being targeted for inward investment, FDI and economic development plus academic, scientific or medical excellence. Wales will be showcased as an agile and innovative nation with a truly global outlook. Synergy with target growth sectors such as Advanced Materials & Manufacturing, Financial & Professional Services and Energy provide real opportunities to attract business events to Wales.

“As a compact connected country, Wales can open doors to innovators, industry experts, professors and scientists with genuine insight into their individual field.”

This is a pan-Wales initiative, spreading the business event impact across Wales' economy whilst also benefitting from the momentum provided by ICC Wales and follows VisitBritain's return to the international business events market, providing further opportunities for Wales.

341 schools set to get superfast broadband thanks to £5m of funding

Currently all schools in Wales have minimum broadband connections of 10Mbps for primary schools and 100Mbps for secondary schools, but some are not able to upgrade the speed of their services to meet ever increasing demand as a result of technical limitations.

In November 2016, £5 million of investment was made available that will cover the installation of new broadband services. This will provide an immediate increase in speed and in line with provision at other schools ensure that connectivity will continue to grow well into the future.

Orders for the new services have started to be placed with the first delivery expected early in the academic year 2017/18.

Prioritising schools' access to superfast broadband was a key part of the progressive agreement between the First Minister and Kirsty Williams.

Changes to the curriculum mean digital skills will now be developed and taught through all parts of a pupil's schooling and not just isolated to specific ICT or computer science classes. The Digital Competence Framework means more than just using computers and aims to equip pupils with the digital skills they need and can apply in the real world in the years to come.

Kirsty Williams said:

"I am committed to making sure all our schools have the infrastructure needed to prepare pupils for the modern world. That is why I announced £5 million of extra investment to make sure all our schools have superfast broadband speeds as a minimum and I am delighted 341 schools will benefit from this.

"Making sure every school, no matter where they are based, has access to superfast broadband remains a priority for me. We know demand for broadband speed in schools will continue to increase. It is simply unacceptable for a school to be at a significant disadvantage due to poor internet speeds. I will continue to make sure our pupils have the right environment to develop their vital digital skills and continue to raise standards."

The Education Secretary has also revealed that the use of the Hwb digital learning platform, which is designed to provide all pupils and teachers in Wales with greater access to a centrally-funded range of online tools and

resources, is increasing.

In March Hwb received over 3.2 million page views and averaged over 28 thousand logins each day which has significantly exceeded original expectations. Recent developments to Hwb have delivered an enhanced experience for teachers and learners, giving quicker access to the tools and resources that are most commonly used. The changes were developed following feedback from teachers.