

Financial incentives to attract graduates into teaching announced – Kirsty Williams

The latest figures show there has been a 3.9% increase in postgrad teacher training applications and a 2% increase in acceptances in Wales, with 3,500 in total for teacher training places in 2016/17.

Every year the Welsh Government invests in the teacher training incentive scheme to attract graduates who want to undertake post-graduate courses so they can teach in classrooms in Wales.

The highest value incentives are targeted toward graduates training to teach physics, chemistry, mathematics, Welsh, computer science and foreign languages who hold a first class degree, with incentives in place for those with for 2.1 and 2.2 degrees.

The funding for those wanting to start courses in September 2017 includes:

- The highest value incentives of up to £20,000 to be available for new students starting postgraduate Initial Teacher Education courses in the subjects of mathematics, physics, chemistry and Welsh.
- Those training for subjects of modern foreign languages and ICT will be eligible for incentives of up to £15,000.

Kirsty Williams said:

“To create an education system that is a source of national pride, we must attract the very best to the teaching profession.

“While teacher vacancy rates in Wales are comparatively low, it is important that we attract graduates with specialist knowledge of our priority subjects, such as maths, physics, and computer science. These incentives will help do just that.

“Alongside our reforms to initial teacher education, professional standards and professional learning, these incentives will help to raise the standard of teaching in Wales as part of our national mission of education reform.”

Kirsty Williams calls on Welsh universities to become Living Wage employers

In her annual remit letter to Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) she has set out her expectations from the higher education sector, including the need for universities to pay their staff the Living Wage.

Currently only one Welsh university is an accredited living wage employer. The Welsh Government has been an accredited Living Wage employer since 2015.

Kirsty Williams said:

“I am ambitious, and confident, that higher education can deliver on our national mission to open up opportunities for all our citizens, raise standards across the board and ensure an education system that is a source of national pride, innovation and confidence.

“The Welsh Government has been an accredited Living Wage employer since 2015. I would also like the Council to begin working with institutions to create a living wage sector. I expect to see rapid progress on this. It is disappointing that only one of our universities is an accredited living wage employer.

“Universities’ commitment to a civic mission requires reach beyond campus and into their host communities. This is not restricted to teaching and research and widening access. It should be demonstrated in how they value their staff and students, and be an example of a progressive and fair employer.

“I would like to see HEFCW work with institutions on these matters, such as procurement, with an emphasis on efficiency, social responsibility and impact, and student, graduate and employer opportunities.”

Last year the Education Secretary called for Welsh universities to reconnect with the communities that surround them.

Free prescriptions are a long term investment in people's health – Vaughan Gething

Since 1 April 2007 prescription medicine has been provided free in Wales. All patients registered with a Welsh GP who get their prescriptions from a pharmacist in Wales are eligible.

The GP is one of a number of frontline clinical experts able to prescribe medication. Others include pharmacists and nurses: prescriptions issued by these are also free of charge.

The decision to abolish prescription charges was taken in light of evidence that some people with serious chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure or heart disease, could not afford their prescriptions and chose to have only part of the prescription dispensed to reduce the cost.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“Free prescriptions were introduced in Wales in 2007 as a long-term investment to improve people's health.

“We were the first of the home nations to take the step to introduce free prescriptions and I'm delighted that both Scotland and Northern Ireland followed our lead.

“We firmly believe by providing people with the medication they need helps to keep them well and out of hospital, thereby reducing the overall cost to the NHS. It should never be the case that people with serious chronic conditions can not afford to collect their prescription.

“Ensuring patients have the medication they need not only improves their own health and wellbeing, it also benefits the health service as a whole by reducing hospital attendance and placing fewer demands on general practitioners.”

“It is socially irresponsible to charge people with serious chronic conditions for the medication they need. Free prescriptions are progressive and an integral part of our health services in Wales.”

A55 update

He said:

“Firstly, over the last 4 years we have undertaken a major programme of works to bring the A55 tunnels at Conwy, Penmaenbach and Pen y Clip up to current legislative and design standards. I am pleased to report that the programme came to an end last night with the re-opening to normal operation of the Conwy tunnel. It is now my expectation that all maintenance and improvement works for the medium to long term will be carried out overnight.

“Last week also saw the re-opening of the westbound A55 at Abergwyngregyn where we are carrying out advance flood alleviation works to improve the resilience of that section of the A55. Works will now continue off-line with little impact on traffic.

“However, the A55 recently suffered a significant partial failure of a bridge joint just west of Llanddulas. We have had to put together an emergency package of works to minimise the impact on the A55 should that joint fail completely. We are thus installing a full central reserve crossover at Rainbow Bridge. This is vital, as any further failure of the joint, which would require immediate and full closure of the westbound carriageway, would allow us to effect contraflow on the eastbound carriageway. That would cause significant delays in itself, but without the crossover the only option would be to divert all traffic, 24/7, onto the old road from Llanddulas to Colwyn Bay (which would result in disruption similar to that caused by last year’s chemical tanker spill but over a much longer period).

“The crossover works, which are being carried out to a extremely challenging programme by local contractors, will be complete by Wednesday 5th April at the latest. The works cannot be removed at the weekend because it is too unsafe to leave a gap of over 200 metres in the central reserve.

“Our suppliers are, concurrently, progressing a design of a temporary fix for the bridge joint which will provide sufficient support to keep the joint from complete failure until we can effect planned contraflow next winter to replace the joint.

“As the works will continue over the forthcoming weekend we are extending messages across the border to warn motorists to allow extra time for their journeys.

“Finally, you may not be aware but we have resurfaced long lengths of the A55 over recent weeks, all carried out overnight with very little disruption to traffic.

“I hope this gives you confidence and reassurance that investment in the A55 is being made at pace, with the aim of minimising disruption. I will not compromise on the safety of motorists, but I am also determined to ensure infrastructure upgrades are carried out in a most timely fashion.

“I will be inviting journalists to visit roadwork sites on the A55 in the future and would welcome the opportunity to host you on such visits.”

[Funding announced for Armed Forces free swimming scheme](#)

AFFS was rolled out nationally from November 2015, with all 22 Local Authorities having a local scheme in place by 1st January 2016. It enables serving members of the Armed Forces and Veterans to swim for free at participating leisure centres and pools, using their Defence Privilege Card.

The funding, announced today, will support the delivery of the scheme in 2017-18.

Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans, said:

“Physical activity has a huge impact on people’s health and wellbeing. The free swimming scheme was designed to ensure members of the Armed Forces past and present are able to benefit from the physical, and mental, health benefits swimming can offer. I am very pleased to announce £75,000 funding for the initiative in 2017-18.”

Communities Secretary, Carl Sargeant, said:

“We owe our Armed Forces a huge debt of gratitude. The free swimming initiative is part of a wider package of support we are pleased to provide to the Armed Forces community in recognition of their service.”

Chris Llewelyn, WLGA Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information, said:

“Local Government is proud to deliver free swimming for our Armed Forces personnel and Veterans. We hope that even more people take

part in the scheme in the coming year, taking advantage of the significant recuperative and social benefits physical activity offers. There are participating pools in each of Wales' local authorities; to find out where your closest facility is, visit your Local Authority website."