

Cabinet Secretary to celebrate the best of Wales in Dubai

In addition to a number of engagements to promote Welsh culture and increase business links between Wales, Dubai and the wider United Arab Emirates, the Cabinet Secretary will join a record twenty five of Wales' finest food and drink producers at the Gulfood Trade Show, one of the world's largest annual food and beverage exhibitions.

The Trade Show is an opportunity to promote Wales' food and drink sector on the international stage and help Welsh producers' efforts to establish new business relationships and expand their sales into potentially lucrative new markets.

During the visit, the Cabinet Secretary will announce she is making £2.4million available to ensure Wales remains well-represented at high profile food and drink trade events and visits around the world over the next two years, providing further opportunities to showcase Wales and world class Welsh produce.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"St David's Day presents us with a fantastic opportunity to celebrate our people, our history, our culture, and, of course, our high quality larder of food and drink produce.

"Wales' food and drinks sector is a success story. We are already more than half way towards achieving our target of 30% growth in the sector by 2020, generating over £260 million from exports.

Almost 90% of these are going to the EU, which is why we strongly advocate, on behalf of Welsh businesses, continued full and unfettered access to the European Single Market.

"It is important we remain an outward focused and welcoming nation. The challenges presented by a "Hard Brexit" are obvious but I am encouraged by the fact Wales' food and drink sector is well placed to tackle the challenges we now face and grasp new opportunities.

"International exhibitions are vital in raising Wales' international profile as they present the opportunity for Welsh businesses to prosper by entering new overseas markets. I am delighted, therefore, to confirm we are investing £2.4m over the next two years to have a strong presence at a series of important food and drink exhibitions and trade visits both in the UK and overseas including a continuation of our ongoing presence at Gulfood."

Lesley Griffiths will also support an additional Welsh Government-led trade

delegation involving twelve small and medium sized enterprises from Wales aiming to grow their business in Dubai and the wider region. The delegation will visit the site of the next World Expo, taking place in Dubai in 2020.

Expo 2020 offers significant commercial opportunities for Welsh businesses of all sizes and in many sectors.

Wales' cultural excellence will be showcased in Dubai by the presence of the Welsh National Opera who will be performing Puccini's Madame Butterfly and La boheme over the first two weeks of March. In addition, during the evening of St David's Day itself, Lesley Griffiths will attend a special performance by a trio of Welsh National Opera performers at a 'Wales – Business and Culture' reception at the British Embassy in Dubai. The event will also provide a high profile opportunity to show Wales' strengths as a place to visit, study and do business.

To end her visit, the Cabinet Secretary will speak at a celebratory St. David's Day Ball organised by the local Welsh Club.

[Kirsty Williams welcomes new OECD report on Welsh education reform](#)

In November 2016, after an invite from the Education Secretary, the highly-respected Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) visited Wales to examine the work underway on education reforms to make sure they are on track.

The [independent findings](#) (external link) published today state that

“the OECD has witnessed progress in several policy areas and a shift in the Welsh approach to school improvement away from a piece meal and short term policy orientation towards one that is guided by a long term vision.”

The report also found Wales' reforms were characterised by close working between government and the education sector with a commitment to improvement “visible at all levels of the education system.”

Kirsty Williams said:

“I invited the OECD to come to Wales to challenge what we are doing to reform our education system and I welcome their findings. They have concluded that we are making progress and we have a long term vision in place to keep improving.

“We are already taking action on many of their recommendations, from creating a new national academy for leadership, transforming initial teacher education, launching new professional standards, and introducing a national approach to professional learning.

“Our job is to continue our national mission of education reform focused on driving up standards and helping every learner in Wales, whatever their background, fulfil their potential.

“As the OECD recommends, our focus must be on making sure we continue to properly implement our vision for reform. I am committed to raising standards, reducing the attainment gap and delivering an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence.”

Both the Education Secretary and Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills for the OECD, will today address representatives from all of Wales’ 205 state secondary schools at a special event in Cardiff.

Our special relationship must boost trade and remove barriers – First Minister’s message ahead of United States visit

Ahead of the visit, the First Minister is calling on the special relationship to be a vehicle for removing barriers and boosting trade between Wales and the USA.

With more than 250 American owned companies based in Wales, the United States is one of Wales’ most important trading partners and accounted for almost 40 percent of all our inward investment projects last year.

Over the next four days, the First Minister will meet with companies looking to invest and expand in Wales and will discuss trade and business links with political representatives.

As part of the response to Brexit, the Welsh Government will be strengthening its network of trade and investment offices across the US. The Welsh Government currently has offices in Washington, New York, San Francisco, Atlanta and Chicago.

The First Minister will also host a St David’s Day reception on Capitol Hill for key political figures and investors, and a reception in New York geared

towards promoting the Welsh tourist industry.

Speaking ahead of the visit, First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“For Wales, the special relationship is about building on the strong cultural and trade links that already exist between our two countries.

“Wales has long been a destination of choice for many American businesses and we want to welcome even more in the future.

Equally, Welsh businesses have been successful in selling to the United States across a range of sectors and I believe we can do even better in the future.

“In my discussions with American businesses, politicians and diplomats, I will be raising the importance of further developing free trade between our countries and the removal of barriers to make trade between us easier and quicker.

“We will also be committing additional resources to North America. We need a permanent presence in Canada, and a strengthened network here in the US. That is a priority for me over the next twelve months, as we restructure our activities overseas to take advantage of new economic opportunities.”

£1.8m to help Fire and Rescue Services deal with water rescue and flooding

The Cabinet Secretary made the announcement on a visit to the Cardiff International White Water Centre, where South Wales Fire and Rescue Service personnel were undertaking water rescue training and gave a demonstration of rescues from vehicles in water, inflatable sled rescues and swift water boat rescues.

Whilst Fire and Rescue Authorities already respond to flooding and inland water rescue incidents using their existing general powers and resources, they are not required to do so. The Cabinet Secretary has therefore signed an Order which will create a statutory duty on the three Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales to respond to such incidents.

To support the introduction of the new duty, funding has been made available to replace ageing flooding and water rescue equipment, and to purchase a second high volume pump in North Wales.

The Cabinet Secretary said,

“The demonstration of water rescue skills here today clearly shows the dedication and professionalism of our firefighters. As a result of their excellent work, we have been hugely successful in reducing the risk of fire in Wales.

“Flooding can be just as hazardous as fire, and more wide-ranging. It can devastate whole communities, threaten widespread casualties, and destroy property and the environment. We need to be sure that our fire services will be ready to respond – and our firefighters need to know what is expected of them. This is why I have created a new duty on our fire and rescue services to respond to flooding or water rescue incidents which pose a direct threat of death or injury.

“They also need the equipment to do this safely and effectively. I am therefore also pleased to announce an extra £1.8 million over this financial year and the next, to enhance and update the boats, pumps and protective gear that our fire services need.”

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service’s Chief Fire Officer, Huw Jakeway said:

“It was a pleasure to welcome the Cabinet Secretary to Cardiff International White Water and for him to see our dedicated crews in action, as part of their ongoing training programme when it comes to water rescues. For us as Fire and Rescue Services in Wales, keeping our communities and firefighters safe in and around the water has always been a priority and the new funding for equipment, over the next two financial years, will enable us to continue to serve our communities to the highest standard.”

[Valleys Taskforce rolls into town](#)

The Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys has been holding a series of public meetings across the region to seek the views of communities about priorities for their local areas and this week the taskforce are meeting at the Cynon Valley Indoor Bowls Centre in Mountain Ash.

Speaking ahead of the meeting Alun Davies said:

“Understanding and awareness of the work of the taskforce is growing and the engagement sessions we’ve held to date have been invaluable in helping to shape our priorities. It is vital we continue to work with and listen to communities and ensure we keep this momentum going.

“From the discussions we’ve had with the public so far, some key themes have emerged. These include the importance of linking businesses with local schools to give young people the confidence and skills they need to enter into the world of work and the importance of linking infrastructure like industrial sites, schools, colleges and transport initiatives together, ensuring true connectivity for the valleys.

“I would urge anyone who feels passionately about where they live to engage with the work of the taskforce and have their say. We’re here to listen and your views will help shape our shared vision for the valleys.”

The taskforce was set up by the Welsh Government in July and aims to build on work previously undertaken across the South Wales Valleys in a more coordinated and targeted way to meet the needs of valley communities.

To learn more about the work of the taskforce or to sign up to attend one of the public meetings, please visit the [Facebook](#) page.