

£95 million investment to train healthcare professionals in Wales

This significant investment will support nurses, physiotherapists, radiographers and a range of health science training opportunities.

It will enable more than 3000 new students to join those already studying healthcare education programmes across Wales.

The funding builds on Welsh Government funding already in place for nursing, providing more than a 13% increase in nursing training places, on top of the 10% increase in 2016/17 and 22% increase in 2015/16. Midwifery training places will increase by 40%.

The support package will also provide an additional £500,000 to support community healthcare such as advanced practice, education and extended skills training to support primary care clusters.

There will also be a significant increase in practice nurse and district nurse education as well as audiology training places within primary and community settings. This will provide vital funding for community services and will ensure many more patients can be cared for closer to home, rather than in hospital.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“We rely on the skills, knowledge and experience of those providing the care in the NHS on a daily basis.

“This includes nurses and paramedics as well as those behind the scenes, who provide vital support services such as laboratory tests to enable diagnoses to be made and “treatment to be provided.

“Education and training is fundamental to ensuring the sustainability of our workforce.

“This £95m investment will ensure that our healthcare professionals are able to provide high quality care now and in the future and that patients’ will be able to receive care closer to home.”

The funding package also includes an additional cohort of physician associate training places available from September 2017 with 12 of these places hosted by Bangor University and 20 hosted by Swansea University.

The funding will also support the integration of hospital and community pharmacy training and education into one programme.

Ken Skates visits Chongqing and Shanghai to cement Welsh links with China

The Cabinet Secretary is being joined in Shanghai by a trade mission of 18 Welsh companies including Clogau Gold, i2L Research, Timberkits, and Tiny Rebel, all looking to increase their trade relationships with the world's second largest economy.

As part of his visit Ken Skates will host St David's Day events for government, business and cultural leaders in both Chongqing and Shanghai, and will promote Wales as an outward facing and forward looking nation, keen to cement links with its global trading partners.

The Economy Secretary will also meet Chinese companies and Government representatives to discuss how trade and cultural links between the countries can be strengthened and to consider how Wales can work to further increase its exports to the lucrative Chinese market.

A Welsh cultural delegation is also travelling to China. It is hoped this will lead to new partnerships, new learning opportunities, and new exchanges of exhibitions and performers, to and from both countries.

Speaking about his visit to China, Ken Skates said:

"China is a huge global force and one that Wales is keen to cement its already strong links with.

"There are currently 19 Chinese companies based in Wales, between them employing more than 2500 people here. And latest figures put annual Welsh exports to China at nearly £209m.

“These are impressive figures but through my visit and the trade mission we will be seeking to build on this success, to grow our share of exports to China and to attract more Chinese investors to Wales.

“Wales has a huge amount to offer as a trading partner, a tourist destination and cultural partner. Following the decision to leave the EU it is more important than ever that we reach out to China and other international partners and continue to work to build a stronger and fairer Welsh economy for all.”

New innovation fund launched

The Innovate to Save fund is a unique partnership between the Welsh Government and Y Lab – itself a partnership between Cardiff University and the innovation charity Nesta – and will work closely with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

The new fund will provide repayable and non-repayable funding and non-financial support to Welsh public services and the third sector. Non-repayable funding will support organisations to prototype, test and develop complex and innovative changes to the way services are delivered.

All areas of the Welsh public and third sectors will be able to apply for Innovate to Save funding. Organisations submitting proposals will also be able to draw on the resources and experience of Nesta and Cardiff University to expand the scope of projects.

The new fund will operate alongside the successful Invest to Save fund, which has been operating since 2009 and has supported 160 projects. In addition to the £5m Innovate to Save fund, £15m will be available through Invest to Save in 2017-18.

Professor Drakeford said:

“At a time of reducing budgets, change is a necessity not a choice. More scarce resources and growing demand means all public services must think and work differently, if we are to continue to provide the level of services people need.

“Our new £5m Innovate to Save fund has been developed in partnership with Y Lab and we hope to see a range of projects coming forward from across the Welsh public and third sectors. The savings generated will not only be re-invested in services but will

improve outcomes for people and will be able to be rolled out more widely.”

Professor Adam Fletcher, Y Lab academic director, said:

“Public services staff in Wales are best placed to solve the biggest challenges facing their own services. This new Welsh Government initiative means Y Lab will be able to work with teams from across Wales to help them to develop solutions to persistent problems, put those ideas into practice and trial them.

“Universities have typically been very good at researching public services and recommending what they should do differently but not so good at working with public services teams to help them to innovate.

“By working in partnership with Nesta, Cardiff University is leading the way in the UK by designing, delivering and evaluating major new innovation funds such as this.”

Helen Goulden, executive director, Innovation Lab, Nesta, said:

“Motivation for governments to rethink and re-shape the way that they engage citizens or deliver services is currently riding high, with examples of governments from across the world choosing to finance public sector innovation.

“Our partnership with the Welsh Government is ambitious, seeking to tackle some of the most complex issues currently facing our public services – and generate cashable savings. The Innovate to Save model is new, blending different kinds of finance and intensive support to achieve this goal.

“Over the next two years it will, I hope, provide the evidence to justify it’s replication in many other areas.”

Pembrokeshire company awarded £5.8m contract for new fisheries patrol vessels

The awarding of the contract follows a competitive international bidding

process and means the vessels will be built in Wales, by a local company and provide skilled employment in Pembrokeshire.

The new vessels will replace the current ageing boats, to effectively protect from illegal fishing activity in Welsh waters and safeguard Wales' fishing industry and coastal communities in the years ahead.

Since its inception in 2014, Mainstay Marine has safeguarded 30 jobs and created 50 new positions, with 98% of its employees based in Pembrokeshire. The company also employs 10% of its direct workforce as apprentices.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, announced the contracts during a visit to Mainstay Marine Solutions' facilities in Pembroke Dock to see the workshops where the vessels will be built.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"The Welsh Government takes very seriously its responsibility for managing and protecting Welsh seas and it's important we have the capability to do this. I am pleased we are replacing our ageing fleet and proud a Welsh company has been successful in winning the contract to complete this work.

"Mainstay Marine Solutions has shown a commitment to up-skilling and developing its workforce locally and it is anticipated the continued success of the company will help create further jobs locally, which is excellent news for the local economy."

Philip Hilbert, Sales Director of Marine Specialised Technology Limited, based in Liverpool said:

"We are delighted to be part of this prestigious project supplying the Cabin RIB which is a flagship project for us. Fisheries enforcement is a key market for us and this craft will be the pinnacle of small craft technology."

The awarding of the contract to Mainstay Marine Solutions follows a European-wide competitive procurement exercise.

The replacement vessels are expected to be in service by Autumn 2018. It will include a 26m Mono-hull Patrol Vessel, South Fisheries and a 19m Catamaran Patrol Vessel, North Fisheries.

Mark Drakeford announces details of High Street Rates Relief Scheme

The scheme will support almost 15,000 shops, restaurants, pubs and cafes, including those which have seen their rates increase as a result of the independent Valuation Office Agency's (VOA) revaluation, which comes into effect on April 1.

The high street rates relief scheme will also provide support to other retailers – some of whom have seen their rates decrease as a result of revaluation – who are struggling in the face of economic conditions and competition from online and out-of-town providers.

Eligible retailers will receive up to £1,500 off their non-domestic rates bill if they have a rateable value of £50,000 or less in the 2017 18 financial year.

To maximise the amount of support which can be provided and ensure it is targeted at areas and businesses most in need, there will be two tiers of relief available.

The first tier of relief will apply to high street retailers with a rateable value of between £6,001 and £12,000 who are already receiving either small business rates relief (SBRR) or transitional rates relief. They will receive a reduction in their rates bill of £500 or, if their bill is less than £500, it will be reduced to nil.

The second tier of relief will apply to eligible high street retailers with a rateable value of between £12,001 and £50,000 which are experiencing a rates increase from April 1. These ratepayers will receive a reduction in their rates bill of £1,500.

They will receive a higher level of support to reflect the fact they are not receiving other support, such as SBRR, and may be facing large increases in their rates following the revaluation.

High street rates relief is unique to Wales and will provide crucial support to small and medium businesses at this time – it is estimated that this will benefit almost 15,000 businesses.

The targeted rates relief scheme will be provided through a special grant made to each local authority.

Announcing the details today, Professor Drakeford said:

“Some retailers across Wales are concerned about increases in their rates as a result of the VOA's revaluation.

“We are therefore providing a further £10m to help businesses in

those communities which have been adversely affected.

“This new scheme is in addition to the £10m transitional relief scheme, which will also be available from April 1 and the £100m tax cut for small businesses in Wales provided by small business rates relief. It will provide vital support to ratepayers on high streets across Wales and offer these businesses extra support.

“Work is already underway to develop a new permanent small business rates relief scheme for 2018. We are listening to the feedback we have received so we can make the scheme as fair, reasonable and transparent as possible.”

The Welsh Government has been working closely with local authorities to develop the scheme and prepare for its implementation.

Retailers can find out whether they are eligible for the high street rates relief scheme in 2017-18 by contacting their local authority. Accompanying guidance will be provided to local authorities to support the effective administration of the relief.

Ben Cottam, Head of External Affairs for FSB Wales, said:

“We welcome that the Welsh Government has made good on its commitment to easing the pressure on high street businesses affected by the introduction of new levels of business rates. We also welcome the Government’s engagement with FSB on this issue in recent months. We would now encourage local authorities to engage quickly with businesses to ensure that all those who are entitled to this relief receive it as quickly and simply as possible.

“This will go some way to providing breathing space for many businesses whom we know have been concerned about the impact of new rates bills on their business.”