

Building Regulations Advisory Committee for Wales welcomes six new faces

Alan Jones, Bernadette Kinsella, Matthew Grey, Paul Williams, Steven Harris and Will Phillips all took up their posts on 1 January and have been appointed for a period of three years.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“The Building Regulation Advisory Committee for Wales plays an important role in advising Welsh ministers on the making and amending of building regulations and other related matters.

“This period of appointment coincides with the Building Regulations Sustainability and Part L reviews. I am confident Alan, Bernadette, Matthew, Paul, Will and Steven will all bring a wide range of expertise and experience to the Committee.”

Members of the Building Regulations Advisory Committee for Wales are appointed on a voluntary independent basis to represent particular fields of expertise and experience.

Latest categorisation figures show school improvement

Published today, the [National Categorisation System](#) has been introduced in 2014 to help identify schools in need of support to improve. Schools are placed into one of four colour-coded support categories to demonstrate the level of support they need.

Each school's category is determined by a range of factors including its performance data and capacity to improve in areas such as leadership and teaching and learning. Local authorities and their regional consortia play a central role in the process which triggers a bespoke package of challenge and support in each school.

Under the system there are four categories – green, yellow, amber and red. Schools in the green category are deemed to be in need of the least support while schools in the red category are those identified as needing the most

support.

This year's results show that there are fewer schools in Wales in need of the highest levels of support when compared to last year. Similarly, there are more schools categorised as needing lower levels of support. In summary:

- the proportion of green schools – those needing less support – has increased by 5 percentage points in the primary sector and 7 percentage points in the secondary sector.
- the proportion of red schools – those identified as needing most support – has reduced by 1 percentage point in the primary sector and 2 percentage points in the secondary sector.
- 41 per cent of special schools have been categorised as green, and needing less support, with only 8 per cent being categorised as red and in need of most support.

Cabinet Secretary for Education Kirsty Williams said:

“This system is not about grading, labelling or creating crude league tables but about providing support and encouraging improvement in our schools. It is about putting schools into a position that helps them to identify areas they can strengthen and what they need to do achieve further improvements.

“The figures we have published today show that 84.4% of primary and 64.6% of secondary schools are now in the green and yellow categories. This increase is to be welcomed, as these schools will have a key role to play in supporting other schools, sharing their skills, expertise, and good practice. In this way they will be making a vital contribution to our national mission of driving forward improvements in Welsh schools and moving us towards a self-improving system.”

The categorisation for all schools is available on the [My Local School website](#) (external link) and the [Welsh Government education pages](#).

[Extra protection for Wales' sea birds and harbour porpoise approved](#)

Following a consultation last year for new Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) for harbour porpoise, the Cabinet Secretary has approved three areas. These have now been submitted to the European Commission for consideration.

The three areas are North Anglesey Marine, West Wales Marine and the Bristol

Channel Approaches.

The areas have been identified based on 18 years of data on harbour porpoise distribution and have been identified as important, having persistently higher densities of harbour porpoise compared to other areas. The SACs will complement existing conservation measures in place throughout UK waters to help maintain the favourable status of the species.

The Cabinet Secretary has also approved three additional marine areas as Special Protection Areas.

These include Northern Cardigan Bay which is home to the wintering red throated diver and an extension to two important seabird breeding areas, Ynys Feurig, Cemlyn Bay and Skokholm and Skomer, to include areas which are vitally important to preening and other behaviours during the birds' breeding season.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“We are committed to creating a network of marine protected areas in Wales so species and habitats can thrive. A rich and healthy marine environment ensures the sustainable use of our seas now and in the future.

“The wide response to Natural Resources Wales' consultation on the protection of marine porpoises shows the value people place in protecting marine life. I am pleased we are taking steps to provide protection for our harbour porpoise and protect important areas for sea birds.”

Ceri Davies, Natural Resources Wales' Executive Director for Evidence, Policy and Permitting, said:

“We are proud that the seas around Wales support such a rich diversity of wildlife, which is highly valued by local communities and sustains important businesses such as fishing, tourism and recreation.

“NRW looks forward to working with stakeholders to ensure that these sites are appropriately managed to help conserve them for future generations.”

Ken Skates will visit China to cement Welsh links

Ken Skates announced his impending visit to China at the North Wales Export Forum – one of two events being held to reinforce the Welsh Government's focus on exports and exporters as the UK prepares for life outside of the EU.

The Economy Secretary said:

“I am pleased to have attended both the South Wales and North Wales Export Forum and to have spoken directly to some of our most influential exporters as we prepare for life outside the EU.

“Increasing the value of exports and the number of exporters in Wales have been central pillars of our economic strategy for some time and at this time of change it is more important than ever that we focus on strengthening our trade relations with countries across the world.

“We already have a comprehensive range of support to help companies export and have been proactive in some of the world's largest markets for some time.

“And I am pleased to confirm that next month I will be joining 18 Welsh companies as part of their next trade mission to China with a view to expanding our trade relations and building on what is already a strong and thriving relationship.

“As part of my trip I will be visiting Chongqing and Shanghai and am optimistic that both my visit and the trade mission will enable Welsh companies to win new export business in China.

“This is borne out by experience as my visit and the trade mission to Japan last October has already resulted in £1.4m of orders and potential contracts for the businesses that travelled there.

“I think we all recognise there are challenging times ahead for businesses. I am determined to make sure that we do what we can to help businesses maintain and, indeed, grow their export business as the UK transitions out of the EU.”

One of the companies attending the February trade mission to China and Hong Kong is Wrexham based, specialist manufacturer Conren. Their company export manager, Veronica Dawson said:

“Exporting is key to our business and we currently export to over 30 markets around the world. It has greatly benefitted our business, providing an essential source of revenue, and it has also encouraged us to be more innovative as we develop our products to meet challenges in the global marketplace.

“The Welsh Government has been key to our export success, providing support and advice as we look to new markets. The Export Forum provided a great opportunity for us to meet other exporters from across Wales and hear how other companies are preparing for the future, and we are very much looking forward to next month’s trade mission.”

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