

[Village with ultrafast broadband wins major European award](#)

The community, between Cardiff and Newport, enjoys broadband with an upload and download speed of 1Gbps or 1000Mbps after pulling together and taking advantage of the Welsh Government's broadband voucher schemes.

The community scooped the award in the Innovative Models of Financing, Business and Investment category at a ceremony in Brussels last night.

Nominees and finalists are selected by an expert jury from across the European Union.

Villagers raised the money required to build the network in the knowledge that once built, the connections would be eligible to be funded by the Welsh Government's Access Broadband Cymru scheme or Ultrafast Connectivity Voucher once the speeds had been reached.

Julie James said:

"This is a tremendous achievement for the community of Michaelston-y-Fedw who through impressive community spirit, hard work and backing from the Welsh Government now have access to ultrafast broadband. To come top in the awards which cover the whole of the EU does them great credit and helps put Wales on the map.

"While the digital landscape in Wales has been transformed by our Superfast Cymru project with more than nine out of ten premises with access to superfast broadband, we know there is more to do to reach the final premises. There is no single solution, and for some a community scheme will be the way forward.

"Michaelston-y-Fedw is a great example of what can be achieved when communities work together with support from the Welsh Government."

To find out more about the Welsh Government's Access Broadband Cymru scheme go to: www.gov.wales/broadband

[New projects to prevent youth homelessness announced by First](#)

Minister

Last year the First Minister announced an extra £10million to support the Welsh Government's mission to end youth homelessness in Wales by 2027. Today, he has set out how this funding will be used to identify those at risk of becoming homeless sooner and to take preventative action.

The funding includes:

- £3.7million for the Youth Support Grant to strengthen services to prevent youth homelessness and tackle its root cause
- £4.8million for an Innovation Fund to develop new housing approaches for young people, which could include support for young people leaving care
- £250,000 for targeted communications and engagement programmes: to improve awareness, understanding and take-up of the services available
- £250,000 for tenancy support work with Shelter Cymru and its existing helpline to ensure young people have better access to information, advice and support services to help them sustain tenancies

The funding also includes £1million to double the St David's Day Fund which already provides practical financial support to care leavers in their move towards adulthood and independence.

Since it launched last year it has provided 1,900 care leavers with financial support to build a home life, such as a deposit for a new home or driving lessons to access employment and education.

The £10million funding is in addition to £20million already allocated by Welsh Government for wider homelessness prevention for 2018 to 2020. The Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Rebecca Evans, will today deliver an oral statement on youth homelessness in the Senedd which will set out the programme of work to be funded in more detail.

The First Minister visited The Hangar Youth and Community Centre in Aberbargoed to meet with young people who have engaged with Caerphilly Youth Service's Engagement and Progression Framework partners to improve their life chances, including around homelessness / potential homelessness-related issues.

Ahead of the visit, the First Minister said:

"Too many young people are facing a future that can seem bleak, unfair and inevitable due to insecure housing. That's why we're committed to ending youth homelessness by 2027.

"Our approach is bold, innovative and focused on interventions that make a real difference to the lives of young people facing homelessness – already since 2015 over 18,000 have been prevented from becoming homeless."

The Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Rebecca Evans said:

“There are a number of complex, but often interrelated factors, which lead to young people becoming homeless. This is not just a housing issue; it is much wider than that.

“This is why earlier this year the First Minister asked me to chair a task and finish group looking at youth homelessness, which is working across government and beyond. We recognise tackling this requires a unified approach from youth services, social services, education, mental health, substance misuse, youth justice and other services.”

Cllr Philippa Marsden, Caerphilly County Borough Council’s Cabinet Member for Education and Achievement, said:

“The announcement of £10million additional investment from Welsh Government to tackle youth homelessness will improve the overall life chances of young people.

“Our Youth Services and the Engagement and Progression framework arrangements, which coordinate multi-agency support to the best effect, play a significant part in this. I welcome the Welsh Government’s target to eradicate youth homelessness by 2027 and this funding is definitely a good step in the right direction.”

New international study pilot to open doors for even more Welsh students

The announcement comes as figures show that only 2% of Welsh students at universities currently spend time abroad studying, volunteering or undertaking work experience as part of their studies.

Developed alongside British Council Wales, the £1.3m pilot – which will run for three years from 2018/19- will offer a mix of opportunities for Welsh students at Welsh HE institutions. These will include study, volunteering and internships, ranging from 2 or 3 weeks to 8 weeks.

The opportunities are designed to attract students who, for reasons such as caring responsibilities or employment, may not have considered an opportunity abroad.

The pilot has been developed as part of the Welsh Government response to the

Diamond Review's recommendations on support for students who choose to study overseas.

In a statement to plenary today, the Cabinet Secretary will say:

“At a time when it's never been more important for our students and graduates to be global citizens, we need to ensure that international opportunities are an aspiration for many more students.

“As someone who benefited hugely from time studying abroad as an undergraduate, I know how such an experience broadens horizons, expands key skills and ensures connections that last a lifetime.

“Research from Universities UK points out that these gains are particularly significant for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, it is these students who too often miss out on, or don't even apply for, these transformational opportunities.

“This new pilot will allow us to reach out to these students and ensure that they too can now take full advantage of these opportunities.

“I want to see the number of Welsh students who spend time abroad as part of their studies, double by the end of this government. This pilot is just one of the ways in which we're trying to achieve that aim.”

[Welsh Government steps up support to tackle online safety](#)

The Welsh Government is urging teachers, parents and carers to read their [Online Safety Action Plan](#) (external link) which provides enhanced support for the online safety of children and young people.

It addresses a wide number of issues, including safeguarding, anti-bullying and cyber security, and builds on existing tools for teaching online safety such as the Hwb [Online Safety Zone](#) (external link) and [360 degree safe Cymru](#) (external link).

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, visited Porthcawl Comprehensive School on Wednesday to congratulate them on achieving the 360 degree safe Cymru award, formally launch the plan and listen to students about their online experiences.

She said:

“Nothing is more important than the safety of our young people – whether that’s physical or online. The internet has completely revolutionised education. Just a few weeks ago I launched Wales’s first ever E-sgol project which uses video technology, via the tools available through Hwb, to connect different classrooms. This is the future, but with emerging technology like this, the safety of our learners has become increasingly important.

“Our National Mission makes a commitment to provide all learners with high-level digital skills and we need to make sure these skills are accompanied by the knowledge to use the internet safely. We all have a responsibility to ensure they are safe online and I urge everyone who cares for or teaches children to read this action plan.”

To ensure the real issues individuals face online are addressed, the Welsh Government worked with NSPCC on a ‘pupils’ voice’ exercise which asked young people about their concerns. Other key stakeholders including Barnados, Estyn and the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales have also been engaged in the production of this plan.

Vivienne Laing, the NSPCC’s policy and public affairs manager for Wales, said:

“Online safety is one of the major 21st century child protection challenges with children often placed at risk of seeing inappropriate content, bullying or even grooming and abuse when using the internet. It is vital that the Welsh Government is at the forefront of efforts to keep young people safe and this plan is a major step forward giving children and parents the knowledge they need.

“We now want to see an online safety advisory group of experts created, which includes young people, to ensure that this plan is implemented effectively and that it stays up to date with changes in technology. And it is crucial that the Welsh and UK Governments work together and with tech companies, law enforcement and charities to make the internet a much safer place for children in Wales.”

Leader of the House with responsibility for digital, Julie James, said:

“We want to give young people the opportunity to maximise their digital skills, this is vital for them and our economy. I was very pleased to attend the launch of the Institute of Coding Wales a few weeks ago which will help ensure schools have access to world-class

digital skills. But we also have a responsibility to ensure young people are safe when online and I urge people to read the National Online Safety Action Plan.”

Alcohol awareness week: “As a society, we’re drinking too much alcohol” – Vaughan Gething

To mark the start of Alcohol Awareness Week, the Health Secretary warned that while for many people in Wales alcohol forms some part of their social lives, as with most activities in life drinking too much alcohol carries a degree of risk. Reducing alcohol intake lowers the risk of suffering long-term diseases in later life.

The harm to people’s health can occur from either the repeated risk of acute alcohol-related accidents or from long-term diseases. These could include various cancers, strokes, heart disease, liver disease, and brain damage, which can take up to twenty years to develop despite drinking for years without apparent harm.

In 2017 there were 540 alcohol-related deaths in Wales, an increase of 7.1% on the previous year – a number the Welsh Government is determined to reduce.

There are a number of changes a person can make to reduce the risk of alcohol-related harm. Alcohol Concern Cymru’s website DrinkWiseWales.org.uk contains a variety of tools and tips to help people continue to enjoy alcohol, whilst reducing their risk.

The Welsh Government is also taking action to reduce alcohol consumption by:

- Providing high-quality treatment through basic harm minimisation and other advice; to detoxification, residential care and relapse prevention;
- Putting in place a dedicated helpline – Dan 24/7 is a free and bilingual telephone drugs helpline providing a single point of contact for anyone in Wales wanting further information or help relating to drugs or alcohol. In 2017/18 there were 5,151 calls to DAN 24/7, a 26% increase on 2016/17. Traffic to the website has also increased by 92% during the same timeframe.

This has led to a number of successes:

- The number of individuals admitted to hospital for an alcohol specific

condition has fallen by 8.8% over the last 5 years. Hospital admissions for alcohol specific conditions involving young people (under 25) has fallen by 25.5% over the last five years to 953 admissions in 2017-18;

- Hospital admissions for fetuses and new-borns affected by maternal use of, or withdrawal from, alcohol or other drugs of addiction have remained very stable over recent years. There have been 64 admissions for fetuses and new-borns affected by maternal use of, or withdrawal from, alcohol or other drugs of addiction in 2017-18, the lowest in the last decade.

Earlier this year, the National Assembly approved the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018, which provides a legislative basis for addressing the longstanding and specific health concerns around the effects of excess alcohol consumption – to improve and protect the health of the population of Wales.

Speaking at the start of Alcohol Awareness Week, Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“Alcohol misuse is a major public health issue that affects the well-being of individuals, families and communities. In 2017 – there were 540 alcohol-related deaths in Wales. These deaths will have been devastating to the families and friends of the individuals concerned, but many of these deaths could have been prevented.

“We are firmly committed to tackling the availability of cheap, strong alcohol through the introduction of a minimum unit price for alcohol. But it’s not just heavy drinkers who are affected. Moderate drinkers are also impacting their health and their life expectancy by drinking too many units a week.

“I’m determined to ensure the action we take saves even more lives – but as a society, we must have a much healthier relationship with alcohol. Alcohol Awareness Week is the perfect time for people to stop and think before they take that drink.”