

Welsh Government marks the launch of new Rural Education Plan with innovative 'E-sgol' project

Based on the successful 'E-Sgoil' initiative introduced by the Scottish Government in the Hebrides, 'E-sgol' will use video technology to connect classrooms. This means that pupils from one school can join classes at other schools remotely, and can access a greater range of subjects in both English and Welsh.

The project aims to bring all schools in Wales into the digital age by introducing innovative teaching techniques. It is just one of the measures in the Rural Education Action Plan which also includes the introduction of a presumption against closure of rural schools, a new Small and Rural School grant, and working alongside BT to improve connectivity in schools in difficult to reach areas. The 21st Century Schools capital investment programme which aims to create modern and sustainable education communities across rural Wales will play an important role in achieving this.

The action plan also sets out additional training and support opportunities for teachers and head teachers in rural areas through the Business Manager Pilot and National Academy for Education Leadership (NAEL) programme; improved emotional and mental health support through the CAMHS in-reach project and aims to ensure schools play a more central role in their communities.

Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams said:

"Today's E-sgol lesson has been great fun and has demonstrated how technology can provide solutions to some of the issues rural schools face. I am delighted to launch the project and am grateful to the Scottish Government for their help in getting the technology to Wales.

"This project will connect pupils in Welsh schools with other schools across the country, and ensure they're given the best learning experience even in the most rural parts of the UK.

"If we ensure that pupils and schools in rural Wales have the right support to succeed, then we can ensure that our rural communities and economy will go from strength to strength."

Scottish Deputy First Minister and Education Secretary John Sweeney said:

"Our languages and culture are important to both our nations and we have strong visions of growth for Gaelic and Welsh going forward.

It is particularly pleasing to see the innovative E-Sgoil model for digital learning, designed and championed by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, with support from the Scottish Government being adopted by the Welsh Government to support their young people's language learning.

"In these times of uncertainty, it is important that we continue to work across our different Governments to identify further potential projects that could benefit our prosperity."

Cllr Angus McCormack, Chairman of Education, Sport and Children's Services at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, said:

"Supported by the Scottish Government, we are constantly discovering new ways that e-Sgoil digital learning allows us to deliver education in ways which we have never before been able to do.

"Our vision is that all learners can experience an education enriched by digital technology. Given the aspirations we have for our respective languages, we are very pleased to be working in partnership with the Welsh Government in order to support their young people's language learning."

[A55 works completed ahead of schedule](#)

Work on the Kneeshaw Lupton underbridge near Junction 23 began on 17 September and the road will be fully re-opened on Friday 12 October, six days before it was originally due to.

Taking place on a 24 hours a day, seven days a week basis, the work on the Kneeshaw Lupton underbridge has involved surface removal, waterproofing of the bridge deck, concrete repair and the replacement of bridge joints.

Due to the nature of the engineering works, boards have been in place with work taking place on the other side of these. Critical work on the bridge joints at either end of the structure, which involved hydro-demolition, has been carried out under cover and out of sight of the public to ensure their safety.

All work on the westbound carriageway will be completed by 6am on 12 October when traffic management measures will be removed.

Action has also been taken to offset the impact for the travelling public by ensuring work on the eastbound carriageway can be delayed until next year.

Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I am very pleased to announce essential improvements to the Kneeshaw Lupton underbridge on the A55 have been completed six days ahead of schedule. This is in no small part down to officials and contractors who have worked tirelessly to conclude work as quickly as possible and I thank them for their efforts.

“I also want to thank the travelling public for their patience whilst this work has been carried out. Disruption is never welcome on our roads, but this work has been absolutely necessary and as the waterproofing element needed to be laid in reasonable weather conditions, doing it after the busy summer period, but before the half term break, was the right time to act.

“The A55 is a vital route in North Wales and these improvements again strengthen its safety, resilience and reliability, matters which are an absolute priority. The Welsh Government is delivering for the region and our commitment and investment in the road network clearly demonstrates that.”

[Multi-million pound investment to develop Urdd residential centres](#)

The £5.5 million will enable Glan-llyn to develop a brand new Educational Centre and upgrade the Water Sports Training Centre, and Llangrannog will be able to implement the plans to transform key infrastructure.

Today 56% of all Welsh schools attend Urdd centres on residential courses, and of those who visited over the past 3 years, 26% came from the 20% most deprived communities in Wales.

More second language Welsh schools visit the centres than first language Welsh schools, which demonstrates their value as an access point to the Welsh language, and that it is alive and relevant.

Confirming Welsh Government’s investment in the scheme, the Education Secretary said:

“It’s my pleasure to announce this funding, under the 21st Century Schools Programme, for the development of Urdd facilities in Glan-llyn and Llangrannog. Modernising education infrastructure plays a key part in raising standards and delivering on our National Mission. The Urdd plays a vital role in providing yearlong learning

opportunities for young people in Wales. They also make a vital contribution to creating children who are social and healthy, and use the Welsh language outside of school. I look forward to seeing these developments and how they will help to improve the Urdd experience for future children.”

Siân Lewis, Urdd Chief Executive said:

“I would like to thank the Education Secretary for supporting our vision for developing Glan-llyn and Llangrannog to be pioneering, modern centres which support ‘learning outside the classroom’. This concept enables children and young people to learn, develop personally and socially, and through Urdd centres this will all be achieved whilst at the same time increasing their confidence in their use of the Welsh language. Thanks to this substantial matching investment from Welsh Government, the Urdd will be able to improve facilities and resources, create new jobs in rural Wales, upgrade infrastructure and create a fantastic environment in which to encourage effective learning throughout the year for future generations of Welsh children and young people.”

The £2.75m capital investment is part of the Welsh Government’s 21st Century Schools and Education Programme and has been agreed as part of the two-year Budget agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

Urdd research shows that schools and educational establishments across Wales have already seen a significant increase in the wellbeing of children and young people as a result of visiting the centres, as well as having a positive effect on their use and preception of the Welsh language.

With 47,000 annual visitors and a turnover of £5.2 million, Llangrannog and Glan-llyn currently employ 160 staff between them. This funding will ensure new employment opportunities to include 12 new apprenticeships. It is anticipated that the increase in visitors at the centres will result in an additional £1.3m in turnover for Urdd Gobaith Cymru.

[Electric charging points on strategic road links in Wales given £2million funding boost](#)

The £2million funding, secured as part of the two-year Budget agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, will be used to help create a

publicly accessible national network of rapid charging points by 2020.

The funding will be focused on locations on or near strategic Welsh road networks, with a particular emphasis on North-South and East-West journeys.

The Transport Secretary Ken Skates said he had also tasked officials to explore the feasibility of funding charging points at park and ride facilities and at taxi ranks.

He confirmed he was looking at a national concession model to deliver and run the network, whereby a contractor would have the exclusive right to operate, maintain and carry out investment in the network. He envisaged the contract would be procured and overseen by Transport for Wales (TfW).

Ken Skates said:

“We are committed to promoting the use of electric and hybrid vehicles in the transition from petrol and diesel.

“This funding for electric charging points will be a massive boost to the network and will help motorists who want to use electric vehicles for longer journeys.

“This could prove to be a catalyst for change in our efforts to support the use of electric vehicles. We have chosen to focus on the North/South and East/West routes as we realise their importance for travelling around Wales.

“In these challenging times it is more important than ever that we work to improve sustainable transport links, to increase our low carbon transport options and to make Wales as accessible as we can.

“This funding is a clear demonstration of our commitment towards mitigating the impacts of climate change alongside reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality.”

There are currently 500 publicly accessible charging points in Wales and 2,500 plug in vehicles.

With the number of new electric and hybrid car registrations in Wales having increased by 35% in 2017 the Welsh Government hopes that this latest investment will help to meet the rising demand and encourage more people in Wales to invest in electric vehicles.

Purple Option for Third Menai Crossing

The Purple option would see a new bridge constructed to the east of the existing Britannia Bridge. Additional facilities for pedestrians and cyclists will be included as part of the scheme.

An appraisal of the options revealed the Purple option provides the highest economic benefits, offers 'high' value for money and is the best performing in terms of highway alignment. It was also the most popular option of the public consultation with 25 per cent of respondents selecting it as their first choice.

As part of the next stages, a procurement exercise will take place to appoint Technical Advisors to develop the preliminary design and prepare for publication of draft Orders and an Environmental Statement.

Further analysis is also required as part of the next stage of development to determine which form of bridge is most suitable. The cost of the structure is dependent on this analysis.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

"The A55 is important locally, nationally and internationally. It provides the main economic artery for North Wales and connects the region with the rest of Wales, the UK and Europe.

"The Britannia Bridge is the only section of the route which is single carriageway and we know this reduction in lanes leads to congestion at peak times and during the tourist seasons. There is very strong case for increasing capacity across the Menai and I am delighted the Welsh Government is taking action to address the issue.

"Based on the appraisal undertaken on the options, the Purple Option performs best and would be vital in improving journey times, strengthening the A55's resilience, and ensuring safer travel across the Menai Strait.

"It will also provide economic benefits and ensure the route is fit for purpose as traffic volume is expected to increase over the years to come."

Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates said:

"We have made it known for a long time our intention to build a third Menai crossing and today's announcement is a significant step forward in delivering exactly that.

“The Purple option provides us with an opportunity to develop a crossing which would allow people to seamlessly cross the Menai Strait and support future projects such as Wylfa Newydd.

“We fully understand the sensitivity of placing a new crossing over the Menai Strait and further visualisation assessment and analysis work will now take place before the bridge type is selected and taken forward to the next stage of scheme development.

“The Welsh Government is investing hundreds of millions of pounds in North Wales and the announcement of the Purple Option as the preferred route for the third Menai crossing is yet another great example of our commitment to the region.”