

New proposals to support Welsh farmers unveiled

The latest Welsh Government Brexit paper, Brexit and our Land, proposes two new large and flexible schemes to replace Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Glastir and other parts of the Rural Development Programme.

The programme will consist of the following two schemes:

- The Economic Resilience Scheme will provide targeted investment to land managers and their supply chains. It will provide investment to increase competitiveness and make improvements in resilience and productivity for high-quality food production.
- The Public Goods Scheme will provide a new income stream to land managers delivering public goods from the land. It will enable them to help address challenges such as climate change mitigation, habitat loss, poor air and water quality.

All land managers will have the opportunity to benefit from the new schemes, not just those currently receiving CAP. However, people will need to do things differently in return for this support.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“Welsh land matters. Over 90% of Welsh land is in the hands of our farmers, foresters or other stewards of the landscape. How land is managed matters to us all and our land managers have the potential to produce outcomes of huge importance to Wales.

“Once we leave the EU, our access to markets and how we compete will change so maintaining the status quo is not an option.

Exiting the EU means we have to do things differently and now is the time to prepare. We need to change how we support our farmers and agriculture sector to make them sustainable and able to thrive in a new trading environment. We have the chance to design a ‘Made in Wales’ system that works for Welsh farmers and our communities.

“The Programme marks a significant change. That is why we want to see a phased transition that balances time needed for change with the need to provide timely support.

“Our new programme aims to keep farmers farming on their land and will enable the sector to thrive in a post-Brexit world.”

No changes will be made to the existing BPS scheme in 2018 and 2019 and all current Glastir contracts will continue to be honoured. From 2020, work will begin to move to the new schemes, including a phased reduction in BPS as new schemes come on-stream. The ambition is to have the new schemes fully in

place by 2025 using existing high-performing Rural Payments Wales systems.

The proposals will be subject to extensive consultation until October, working closely with key partners. A white paper setting out detailed proposals will be published next spring and we will publish a Bill before the end of this Assembly session to make provision for the reform. Funding from old schemes will not be withdrawn until new schemes are ready.

Currently, the Common Agricultural Policy provides around £300m a year of support for Welsh land managers. The Brexit and our Land paper reiterates the importance that Wales should not lose a penny from leaving the EU and calls on the UK Government to urgently confirm that Wales will maintain its current share of funding.

Sustainable packaging company expanding rapidly following Welsh Government support

Transcend Packaging is quickly developing a reputation as a leading innovator in sustainable packaging, specifically for the food service, confectionery, and health and beauty sectors.

It produces a broad range of products, from paper straws through to folding cartons, and has assembled an experienced team of industry specialists who are focused on creating sustainable packaging solutions which meet customer needs while minimizing damage to the environment.

The company has been in talks with the Welsh Government about a package of support for some months and Economy Secretary Ken Skates has now confirmed that Transcend Packaging is set to receive more than £500,000 over three years which will help create around 102 new jobs.

The Welsh Government support is on top of an £11m investment by the company who predicts it will grow its workforce from 20 employees to a target of more than 200 by the end of 2021.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“The Welsh Government is proud to be supporting Transcend Packaging as it works to create an additional 102 jobs in Ystrad Mynach. This supports the priorities outlined in Our Valleys Our Future, to create thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs in the Valleys.

“Not only is the company rapidly becoming a leader in its field, it is also helping one of the biggest global fast food names to slash its use of single use plastic.

“Transcend Packaging’s focus on decarbonisation and innovation is exactly the sort of behaviour we are trying to encourage with our Economic Action Plan and the Welsh Government is proud to be working hard to support such an ethical and forward looking business.”

Lorenzo Angelucci, Managing Director of Transcend Packaging said:

“We founded Transcend Packaging because we aspire to help companies become more sustainable across a broad range of products from paper straws to folding cartons. Our entire Transcend team appreciates the generous support from the Welsh Government and we look forward to providing jobs in Wales for many years to come.”

“By working in partnership with local and regional government, leading companies and the wider public, we are able to provide innovative packaging solutions that help preserve a healthy environment. We believe that British companies can help drive innovation in sustainability and are proud to be the leading producer of eco-friendly paper straws in the United Kingdom. We applaud forward thinking companies like McDonald’s UK and Ireland who have selected Transcend to provide their paper straws which we will begin producing in Wales this summer.”

Wales to put gender equality at the heart of Government – Welsh Ministers sign up to new approach to tackle gender inequality

On International Women’s Day, First Minister Carwyn Jones committed to make Wales a world leader in gender equality and commissioned a rapid review to bring new impetus to the Welsh Government’s work.

Chwarae Teg’s report, which is the first phase of a two-part review, examined the Welsh Government’s gender equality policies and considered them alongside examples of global best practice presented in the WCPP’s report.

The review found that, while much has been achieved in Wales, gender inequality remains a stubborn feature of Welsh life. Today's report lays the foundation for change based on three key themes:

Vision and Leadership – while the report found Wales has some world leading legislation, more must be done to maximise its full potential to have a greater impact. The Welsh Government also has an important role to play in leading by example as both an employer and a policy-maker to drive lasting change.

Policy in Practice looks at the way the Welsh Government designs and implements policies and legislation. The report has identified areas of good practice and made recommendations about how this can be delivered more consistently.

External Scrutiny and Accountability finds that external scrutiny is welcomed and that effective scrutiny drives behaviour change. The report identifies that there is scope to strengthen accountability across the legislative and regulatory framework.

Phase Two of the review will consider these challenges and develop clear objectives, measurable targets and financial implications of their recommendations.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“Chwarae Teg’s report shines a light on the things we need to improve and challenges us to do better. It also presents exciting opportunities for change and I am proud to say that my Cabinet has signed up to the report and has committed to integrating gender equality into policy and decision making.

“Change needs to happen if Wales is going to become a world leader in women’s rights and gender equality. As the report says, we already have world-leading legislation in place and some progress has been made, but we must be more ambitious if we want to become a Feminist Government and improve the lives of women and girls.”

The Leader of the House, Julie James, said:

“This report is a direct and significant challenge to us – this is just what we expected and wanted.

“The report begins to pose the questions we need to ask ourselves and consider what we can do to strengthen the building blocks for achieving gender equality. There is vision and leadership in Wales to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment; however, it needs to be strengthened. We can and will do better.”

Welcome progress in the Valleys

The Our Valleys, Our Future action plan was published a year ago and set three core priorities, based on feedback from people living and working in the Valleys. It outlined an ambitious plan for lasting change across the South Wales Valleys.

A more detailed delivery plan, highlighting more than 60 individual actions in the three priority areas, was published in November 2017.

At the heart of both the action plan and the delivery plan are good-quality jobs and the skills to do them, better public services and my local community.

The taskforce is today publishing a first-year progress report, detailing the breadth of the work over the last 12 months.

Mr Davies, who chairs the taskforce, said:

“A year ago, the taskforce set the challenging target of closing the employment gap between the South Wales Valleys and the rest of Wales. This means helping an extra 7,000 people into fair work and creating thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs in the Valleys.

“In the past 12 months, more than 1,000 economically-inactive people living in Valleys taskforce areas have started work through Welsh Government-led employment programmes. Nearly 1,000 people and small businesses have been helped through advice and business support; and an additional 100 new enterprises have been created within the Valleys taskforce area.

“Local authorities in each of the seven strategic hub areas have made good progress in developing plans bespoke to their local area which have the best opportunities to attract private sector investment and create jobs. The early work on the hubs is highlighting the benefit that a joined-up approach to this type can bring. We have seen this already with the Taff Vale project, which will provide the new headquarters for Transport for Wales and help to revitalise Pontypridd’s high street.

“The Tech Valleys strategic plan has been published, providing

strategic direction for investments and programme activity for Ebbw Vale, alongside a £25m commitment between 2018 and 2021.

“Following on the recent announcement on the South Wales Metro, a new rail depot at Taff’s Well will house and service 36 of the new vehicles and eventually be the base for 400 train crew and 35 Metro vehicle maintenance staff. The new Taff’s Well depot will also be home to an integrated control centre for the South Wales Metro employing 52 staff.

“We are also taking forward three digital pilot schemes for the Valleys to improve the way public services are delivered in the region. We are exploring ways to extend public sector broadband networks and create a simple way for members of the public to identify free Wi-Fi hotspots within Valleys communities. We are also looking to create an Uber-style app, which would bring together all providers of community transport, making it easier for people to access transport to health appointments when required. Finally we want to increase the use of the online data mapping tool Lle as a means of promoting the Valleys.

“The Valleys Landscape Park idea is key to the third of the priorities in Our Valleys, Our Future. It is at the heart of our ambition to help Valleys communities celebrate and make the most of their natural resources and heritage.

“We have spent much of the last year working on developing this exciting, dynamic approach, which could connect what we are calling ‘discovery locations’ across the Valleys with walking trails and cycle routes. It is my intention that this will be developed within a defined boundary and supported by a designated land status for the Valleys.”

Yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary and his taskforce colleagues launched a new song for the Valleys at an event in Neath. Sing it Loud, Sing it Proud has been written and performed by local school children in partnership with Welsh language singer and songwriter Kizzy Crawford and is available via Spotify.

Mr Davies added:

“We know just how much the Valleys have to offer – but I want the rest of Wales and the UK; and the world, to learn more about the area’s history; its culture and its breath-taking scenery.

“I would strongly encourage everyone to listen to and download Sing it Loud, Sing it Proud – it’s a great demonstration of just how proud our young people are of their home in the Valleys.”

Expansion of medical education in Wales

By 2019, through collaboration between Cardiff and Bangor Universities, arrangements are expected to be in place for students to be able to study all of their medical degree in north Wales.

This will be accompanied by an immediate expansion of medical education in Wales, with 40 new funded medical places available from September, 20 in each of Cardiff and Swansea medical schools. Swansea University will also collaborate with Aberystwyth University to increase opportunities in west Wales.

Students will undertake as much of their studies as possible in community based settings to reflect Welsh Government policy that care should be delivered as close to patients' homes as possible.

Mr Gething said:

"I am very pleased to announce that students will be now be able to start their journey of becoming doctors by studying medicine in north Wales. This is the result of Welsh universities working together to address the challenges we face in sustaining our medical workforce in Wales.

"I have always been clear that, rather than creating a new medical school in North Wales, the best way to expand medical education there would be through collaboration. This means we will have students studying medicine in north Wales far quicker than we would ever see through the establishment of a new medical school.

"It is also important to acknowledge the challenges faced in other parts of Wales, especially in the west. That is why we are increasing numbers at Swansea and supporting them to work with Aberystwyth University to ensure increased opportunities in west Wales."

Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams, said:

"I am delighted that we are expanding the medical school places available in Wales and students will have the opportunity to study for their degrees in North and West Wales. We have worked closely with the universities to make sure these new places are available as quickly as possible and I am grateful for the work undertaken by them to make this important expansion a reality."

Bangor University Vice-Chancellor, Professor John G. Hughes said:

“This is a tremendously exciting development, and we very much look forward to working with Cardiff University and the health boards to educate many more doctors in north Wales over the coming years.

“This development, starting in 2019, will allow us to rapidly expand the medical education currently provided at Bangor University and introduce more medical students to north Wales, which will no doubt be of benefit to patients and the public in the region. I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in bringing this to fruition. A lot of hard work now lies ahead, and I know that everyone will be doing all they can to make this a great success.”

Dr Stephen Riley, Dean of Medical Education at Cardiff University said:

“We welcome the Minister’s announcement in support of our efforts to deliver innovative and distributed medical education in Wales. It presents an excellent opportunity to build on established relationships with both Bangor University and Aberystwyth University, as well as the associated University Health Boards across Wales. This additional investment will allow us to push forward on widening access to medicine and increasing diversity within the medical profession whilst addressing local population health needs.”