

Adult learning key to helping people into work

The Minister was marking the start of Adult Learners' Week by visiting Kidzz Fun in Ystrad Mynach where Working Links, an organisation that helps socially excluded people maximise their potential, were holding an open day.

The soft play centre was open to families free of charge so that parents could meet local employers and receive advice on options for returning to work and accessing learning opportunities, all while their children were busy playing.

Funded by the Welsh Government and the European Social Fund and organised by the Learning & Work Institute Wales, Adult Learners' Week is the UK's largest annual festival of learning. It aims to inspire thousands of adults each year to discover how learning can change their lives – people like Aqsa Ahmed-Hussein.

Asqa agreed to an arranged marriage at the age of 18, when education was the furthest thing from her mind. By the age of 28 she had four children saw herself as 'just' a wife and mum, but when Aqsa's fourth child was due to start school she knew she needed to update her skills to support her family.

She completed several courses including computer skills, child psychology, counselling skills and a teaching assistant course, all of which gave her the skills she needed to find a job that made paying for childcare worthwhile. Now 41, Aqsa works full-time as a one-to-one classroom assistant at a primary school and is considering further training to become a teacher.

The Minister said:

"I was very pleased to visit Kidzz Fun today and to see how Working Links are helping people in the area learn about the opportunities that are available to them and encouraging people to learn new skills.

"We are committed to improving the prosperity of the people of Wales and the Employment Plan I launched earlier this year sets out clearly how we intend to provide an individualised approach to help people tackle the barriers that are preventing them from working.

"For many, the barrier is a lack of skills or qualifications. In 2017, 21% per cent of those who were economically inactive reported having no qualifications, compared to just 5% of those in employment. This is why I am committed to helping people to improve their skills through adult learning as it will improve their chances of getting fair, secure and rewarding employment.

"Undertaking new learning as an adult is a not only a great way to

improve employability but is also a fantastic opportunity to meet new people, make new friends as well as boosting self-esteem and confidence.”

The Learning and Work Institute Director for Wales David Hagendyk said:

“Faced with an ageing society, a changing world of work, and the rapid deployment of automation and artificial intelligence, giving adults the opportunity to learn throughout their lives is more important than ever. Adult Learners’ Week gives thousands of people across Wales the chance to have a go at learning something new and to develop their skills.”

More information:

For more information on Adult Learners’ Week and find events near you, go to [Careers Wales](#), call 0800 028 4844 or follow [@skillsgatewaycw](#).

[Go ahead for £3.5m Data Innovation Accelerator](#)

The new Data Innovation Accelerator (DIA) has been part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Welsh Government who are joining forces with Cardiff University to develop the project.

Its aim is to transfer data science and analytics knowledge from Cardiff University to Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Wales so they can develop and grow their businesses.

The funding will enable researchers to work on collaborative projects with companies specialising in ICT and cyber security, advanced materials, energy and eco-innovation.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I am proud that the Welsh Government is supporting this exciting Data Innovation Accelerator which will bridge the link between research and business so that companies on the ground can benefit from some of the innovative and ground breaking research undertaken in Wales.

“The project is very much in line with our Economic Action Plan, which, sets out a clear whole Government approach to supercharging

the hi-tech businesses of the future.

“The £1.86m from the ERDF through Welsh Government will help SMEs in Wales to flourish, creating high quality data science jobs and helping to develop exciting new products and services that can be used in Wales and throughout the world.”

Cardiff University’s School of Computer Science and Informatics will be recruiting eight skilled data scientists to kick-start the project this autumn.

DIA co-director Professor Roger Whitaker, College Dean of Research and Professor of Collective Intelligence, said:

“The DIA will help exploit a growing opportunity for greater economic exploitation of data-driven analysis and machine intelligence in businesses, using a targeted approach aligned to sector strengths in Wales, including ICT and cyber security; Advanced Materials; Energy & eco-innovation.”

Fellow DIA co-director, Dr Pete Burnap added:

“The DIA will fill a gap in the current ‘data science eco-system’ in Wales. Schemes exist to support undergraduate qualifications, graduate mentoring, and help bigger businesses buy in expertise. But no provision currently exists to systematically build Data Science awareness, capacity and skills with SMEs in Wales. SMEs do not have the scale of resources available to the public sector or large companies to ‘trial’ new ways of working, or invest in unproven business transformation underpinned by data science. DIA seeks to address this gap.”

The DIA, which expects to launch in November, will be based within the Data Innovation Research Institute at Cardiff University.

North Wales set to welcome the final stage of the OVO Energy Women’s Tour

In recent years North Wales has hosted the men’s OVO Energy Tour of Britain on four occasions, but this year will mark the first time that the world’s top female riders have had the chance to race in the area.

Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport, Lord Elis-Thomas, who will attend the stage finish in Porth Eirias for the winners' presentation, said:

"I'm delighted that we're supporting this race for the first time this year. As Britain's only international level stage race for women, the event attracts the best female riders in the world – and is an excellent event to raise the profile of women's sport, the sport of cycling and to encourage participation and healthy lifestyles. The route will showcase Wales' landscapes and will also highlight some of our epic shores which we're celebrating during the Year of the Sea in 2018.

"Spectators in Wales also give our cyclists such a fantastic welcome and I hope that the crowds turn out on Sunday to cheer the cyclists along the finishing stage of this race."

The five-day race will conclude with a tough 122-kilometre stage from Dolgellau to Colwyn Bay, the cyclists will travel along some of the most scenic routes in Wales which make up The Wales Way – the family of three routes around Wales. The Wales Way is the umbrella name for three routes, celebrating key tourism products and experiences along the North Wales Way, the Coastal Way and the Cambrian Way which will encourage visitors to explore more of Wales.

As Wales celebrates the Year of the Sea in 2018, the first part of the stage will track the beautiful Welsh coastline of Tremadog Bay, through Barmouth and Harlech, before heading inland to tackle several climbs as the route crosses Snowdonia, via Beddgelert and Betws-y-Coed to finish on the North Wales coast at Porth Eirias, Colwyn Bay.

In total 17 teams will compete in the 2018 OVO Energy Women's Tour, including four British squads, Wiggle HIGH5, Trek Drops, WNT Rotor and Storey Racing, with the riders set to compete in the race being announced during the early summer.

A one-hour highlights programme of every stage will be broadcast daily on ITV4 and Eurosport and available on demand via the ITV Hub and Eurosport Player. The OVO Energy Women's Tour is a part of the UCI Women's WorldTour, comprising 23 events around the world in 10 different countries.

[Letter to Home Secretary – Scottish and Welsh Ministers outline concerns](#)

over EU Exit Settlement Scheme

In the letter, the 2 Cabinet Secretaries ask for devolved administrations to be fully consulted on the rules around settled status ahead of their publication. In addition, they also request an urgent meeting to discuss outstanding concerns on the EU Exit Settlement Scheme for EEA citizens.

Full text of the letter below.

Dear Sajid

We are writing to you to relay our very serious concerns about a number of immigration related matters which are causing great uncertainty across Scotland and Wales. While immigration is a reserved issue, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government have a clear interest in the operation of the immigration system given the valuable contribution migrants make to our economies, our public services and our communities.

We have been engaging with EEA citizens across Wales and Scotland extensively since the result of the EU referendum, and a consistent theme in all of those conversations is a desire for clarity on the Settled Status Scheme. There are potentially significant numbers of people who are at risk of missing out on settled status simply due to being unable to, or unaware that they can and need to apply. This continuing lack of detail is not only a serious issue for our two governments, but is clearly of significant concern to EEA citizens, who are understandably anxious about what Brexit means for their future, and the future of their families.

We understand that our officials, together with local government representatives, are taking part in Home Office meetings to ensure that EEA citizens are informed about the Settled Status Scheme, and to make the Scheme accessible for all applicants. However, in the meetings held to date, there has been a severe lack of detail about any overarching communications, engagement or outreach strategy to support the Scheme. Nor have they provided detailed information about any plans which may or may not exist to provide practical support for those in Scotland and Wales who may face difficulties in applying, such as the Assisted Digital Service.

We would also remind you that overall responsibility for policy, strategy and funding of local government in Scotland and Wales is a devolved responsibility. It is wholly unacceptable that your Department should consider imposing additional responsibilities on local government without appropriate inter-governmental consultation and discussion or that engagement with local government on clearly devolved functions should take place without formally approaching your Ministerial counterparts here in the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government first. As a new burden, our clear expectation is that the UK Government should fully fund the costs of any proposed additional responsibilities and there should be full consultation with us and our local government partners to establish and agree what those costs might be.

We are concerned about the lack of clarity around the expected role of local government with regards to the Settled Status Scheme, both in terms of informing EEA citizens about the scheme, and in terms of supporting individuals through the application process. Local authorities need clear guidance and messaging around what will be expected of them, including clarity on what resources will be made available to local authorities to support any additional responsibilities. We strongly encourage you to improve engagement with local authorities at political and officer level working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Welsh Local Government Association to ensure this lack of clarity is rectified. The Third Sector also needs to be meaningfully engaged in this work and we would like to request that your Department undertakes face to face engagement with these stakeholders in Scotland and Wales.

We understand the UK Government is planning to set out more details about the Scheme before the summer, including draft immigration rules, and we would like to request early sight of these, as well as confirmation that Devolved Administrations will be fully and meaningfully consulted on the content in advance of publication.

If the UK Government is seeking the support of the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government, of Scottish and Welsh local government, and of devolved public services in the Settled Status process, then we need clarity about that process, the ask of local government and devolved public services, and the support which will be provided to EEA citizens resident in both countries.

Finally, we remain deeply troubled that we are yet to see any detail on the long-delayed White Paper or Immigration Bill. This delay prolongs uncertainty over the UK Government's intentions in relation to people coming to the UK after the transition period, which adds not only to the uncertainty for individuals, but also to our concern about the impact on our economies and public services.

Given the lack of meaningful engagement with our governments to date, we hope these concerns and requests are taken seriously and are responded to with urgency.

We are copying this letter to David Sterling, the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, the Secretary of State for Wales, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Welsh Local Government Association.

Fiona Hyslop MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Culture,
Tourism and External Affairs

Mark Drakeford AM/AC
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyllid
Cabinet Secretary for Finance

Speed restrictions to come into force to improve air quality and save lives in Wales

The measures are aimed at reducing levels of nitrogen dioxide where emissions have been found to exceed legal limits.

Poor air quality contributes to an estimated 2,000 deaths per year in Wales, with exposure affecting vulnerable population groups in particular. Gases such as nitrogen dioxide can increase the symptoms of people with lung diseases, while short-term exposure is associated with increased cardiovascular and respiratory morbidity.

The temporary 50 mph speed limits will be introduced at short stretches of road, between 1.4km to 5.9km in length, at the following five locations:

- A494 at Deeside
- A483 at Wrexham
- M4 between Junctions 41 & 42 (Port Talbot)
- M4 between junctions 25 & 26 (Newport)
- A470 between Upper Boat & Pontypridd

Other measures include increased signage to promote smooth traffic flow. The measures are expected to deliver immediate improvements to air quality, with emissions estimated to potentially reduce by up to 18% at the five locations.

Evidence shows that nitrogen dioxide emissions are at their lowest when light vehicles, the main contributors to emissions, travel at speeds between 40 and 50 mph. The speed limits are also expected to have a smoothing effect, with vehicles travelling at more constant speeds.

The temporary speed restrictions are part of a range of actions being introduced by the Welsh Government to improve air quality in Wales, including a new £20m Air Quality Fund, a Clean Air Zone Framework and a new Air Quality website providing local data on air pollution levels.

Minister for Environment Hannah Blythyn said:

“I am committed to taking action to reduce air pollution in Wales to support a healthier future for our communities and protect our natural environment. Current levels of nitrogen dioxide exceed the legal limit at the five road locations, so we need to act as soon as possible.

“We have been carrying out investigations into all potential measures for reducing nitrogen dioxide levels. Our initial studies tell us that 50 mph speed limits should have the greatest potential to improve air quality at each location. The actions we take to improve air quality in Wales have a key role in supporting the right conditions for better health and well-being.”

Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, said:

“I want to see concrete measures put in place by the UK Government which focus on removing the source of the problem. They have prevented us from taking our preferred course of action – it is now time for them to step up and use the powers which they have so closely guarded for the benefit of the people of Wales.”

“The root cause is the emissions from vehicles, but legislative competence for vehicle standards and fiscal measures, such as the Vehicle Excise Duty and Company Car Tax, remain with the UK Government. Despite repeated calls, the UK Government has consistently refused to devolve powers which allow us to improve standards and incentivise improved emissions through the tax regime.”

A consultation is open until 19 June on plans to reduce concentrations of nitrogen dioxide, as part of the wider UK plan to tackle roadside NO₂ concentrations.