

Successful implementation key to Economic Action Plan says Cabinet Secretary

This was the message from Economy and Transport Secretary, Ken Skates when he spoke at the Swansea University School of Management Business Forum event which focussed on Wales' transport and infrastructure.

The Cabinet Secretary called on the business community to work with the Welsh Government in making the implementation of his Economic Action Plan a success.

He said:

“Our Economic Action plan is a plan for inclusive growth built on strong foundations, supercharged industries of the future and productive regions.

“It provides us with an exciting opportunity to work in a different way in order to drive up wealth and well being, to tackle inequalities and to future proof our country and economy against an unprecedented pace of change.

“And there is no doubt that transport infrastructure, and its role in connecting our communities, people and businesses to jobs, facilities, services and markets, is key to the plan's success.

“Our challenge and mission now is to translate the content of the Economic Action Plan into meaningful delivery that benefits our businesses and communities.

“This will include a real focus on first class implementation of our 'big ticket' policy changes such as the development of our new Economic Contract, and the rolling out of our Economy Futures Fund.

“Of course we cannot do this alone. We need to work constructively with our partners in business, in the trade unions, in the third sector, in local government and others, in order to make the Economic Action Plan one that truly delivers for Wales. And I urge all our partners to work with us on this important task.”

The Economy Secretary also stressed how important the coming months and years would be for public transport in Wales.

He said:

“In 2018 we expect to become the franchising authority for rail and will award the next Welsh & Borders rail services contract. This will help us to achieve better rail services and transform our network so that our ambitions for a metro that connects our people to jobs and services becomes a transformative reality.”

£100m to deliver 21st Century Schools

An extra £75m, has been allocated to the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme a major, long-term and strategic capital investment programme to modernise education infrastructure.

In addition, £30m will be released from the programme in future years for immediate investment in capital projects that will contribute to the goal of reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050. This is a shared priority with Plaid Cymru.

The money will bring the total invested over the life of the programme to almost £3.8bn. The first phase of the programme will finish in 2019 having invested £1.4bn to support the rebuild and refurbishment of more than 150 schools and colleges across Wales. The second phase will see a spend of £2.3bn.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Our national mission is to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence. Our 21st Century Schools and Education Programme plays a key part in this and is the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s.

“Having a comfortable, modern, fit-for-purpose environment in which to learn is vital to ensuring young people have the best possible education. This extra funding will mean that even more of our students will be able to benefit from having the best possible facilities in their schools and colleges.

Eluned Morgan said:

“Reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050 is a significant challenge and education is key to the success of this ambition. This means we need to invest in new Welsh medium schools and improve and increase the teaching of Welsh in English medium schools. Bringing forward this funding for immediate investment

allows us to ensure there is no delay in the work to achieve this target.

Dydd Miwsig Cymru close to Minister's heart

The Minister set up a Welsh record club in her old school, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf to encourage fellow pupils, many of whom came from non-Welsh speaking homes, to engage with the Welsh language outside of lessons. She also sold bimonthly Welsh language music magazine Sgrech (Scream) in the school and arranged bus trips from Cardiff to the annual Sgrech awards night in North Wales.

In a commemorative issue of the magazine, published in 2005, 20 years after the magazine stopped publishing, the Minister wrote about her involvement with the Welsh language music scene.

She wrote:

“The 80s were an exciting time in the Welsh pop world. There would be a gig somewhere nearly every weekend and they were opportunities for those of us who followed Welsh pop to meet up. 80% of the children at my school, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf, came from homes where no Welsh was spoken. If the children didn't take an interest in school, they were unlikely to take an interest in Welsh.

“I started a Welsh record club in school and, as it was an excuse not to go out in the cold, many fellow pupils came along. They started to realise Welsh was something that extended beyond the classroom...

One of the highlights was a trip to the Sgrech awards night. For a small, isolated group from the city to go to the other end of Wales and see thousands of Welsh speakers in one place was quite something!”

With responsibility for promoting the Welsh language now a major part of her portfolio, history is repeating itself, albeit on a larger scale for the Minister.

The scene itself is also on a larger scale. To mark Dydd Miwsig Cymru, Spotify will reveal the number of hours of Welsh language music streamed by the service in 2017. Shazaam will also be releasing a list of the top 20 most Shazammed artists of 2017 and NME will be letting its 900,000 followers how

they can celebrate the day.

Rather than having to arrange bus trips across Wales to go to gigs, Welsh music is now accessible world wide at the touch of a button. Six bespoke playlists including Acoustic, Electronica, Campfire Sing Song, Chill Out, Workout and Legends will be available on Spotify, Apple Music and Deezer through a Shazam code. The day will also feature on BBC Breakfast and BBC Radio stations across the nation.

There are gigs too for those who prefer their music live. Free gigs for children and adults are happening all across Wales. There are even events as far afield as Budapest and Brooklyn.

The Minister said:

“Digging out the article brought back some lovely memories, although maybe not of my hairstyle! I have always been passionate about encouraging others to use Welsh and to use it in social settings rather than just in school or at work.

“Reaching the target of a million Welsh speakers is a task that requires changing a culture and government cannot do that alone. This is why I am calling on every Welsh speaker to play their part in encouraging or helping someone to learn Welsh.

“Dydd Miwsig Cymru provides the opportunity to do just that so I am thrilled to be a part of it this year. As I found with my classmates, music is an ideal way to introduce people to the language in a social setting and to show that Welsh is a language that is alive and thriving.

“The events taking place show the diversity of Welsh language music. There really is something for everyone wherever you are and whatever the sort of music you like so I’d urge everyone to go to a gig or download a playlist. You don’t even have to get off your sofa to take part!”

[Wales welcomes UKinbound’s 2018 Annual Convention](#)

In addition to an Annual General Meeting, delegates will attend appointment led business workshops, business seminars, networking events and UKinbound’s black tie dinner and Awards for Excellence ceremony, at National Museum Cardiff hosted by Welsh comedian Rod Woodward.

Visit Wales has worked closely with UKinbound to ensure that all those attending can experience Wales' diverse tourism product. On Friday 9th February delegates will embark on a familiarisation trip to noted Cardiff attractions including the Principality Stadium, Cardiff Castle and Cardiff Bay.

Tour operator delegates have also been offered a series of weekend familiarisation trips, taking place from Friday 9 to Sunday 11 February. The itineraries include a range of highlights such as Cyfarthfa Castle, Penderyn Distillery, Elan Valley, Yr Ysgwrn, The Slate Caverns in Llechwedd, Portmeirion, Conwy Castle and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct.

The convention is an excellent way of raising the profile of what Wales has to offer. Meeting with the tourism businesses from Wales and seeing the product first hand is an excellent showcase of Wales' tourism industry – and can make all the difference in whether Wales is featured in a brochure or tour.

£23.8 million of tourism business was generated to Wales in 2016 from a sample of 533 UK-incoming, international and domestic tour operators which Visit Wales has been targeting – and this area of business has seen considerable growth over the past 5 years. Visit Wales is working with UKinbound as one way to further increase Wales' share of overseas visitors coming to the UK.

Tourism Minister, Lord Elis-Thomas will attend the Convention's Gala dinner and, said ahead of the event:

"I'm delighted to extend a very warm welcome to Wales to the UKinbound Annual Convention in Cardiff and look forward to welcoming the delegates in person at the National Museum Cardiff.

This event is an excellent opportunity to elevate Wales's status within the UK tourism industry and promote the destination to the country's leading inbound tour operators. I'm confident that the delegates will find a contemporary, high quality destination which will appeal to their international clientele.

"Tourism in Wales is in a strong position and we look forward to working with UKinbound as we celebrate the Year of the Sea 2018 – a bid for Wales to make it's mark as the UK's top 21st century coastal destination – with world class products, events and experiences. Croeso i Gymru – Welcome to Wales."

UKinbound's chief executive officer, Deirdre Wells OBE said,

"We are delighted to be in Wales for our 2018 convention and are excited to welcome delegates to the wonderful city of Cardiff. Inbound tourism is a crucial revenue earner for businesses across the UK and Wales and bringing over 250 of our members to Cardiff

will enable them to not only discover what Wales has to offer but also provides them with the commercial opportunities and insights to help grow their business in 2018 and beyond.”

Exercise to test Foot and Mouth Disease contingency plans to take place

Welsh Government officials and veterinary experts will work in partnership with counterparts in the Devolved Administrations, Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on a real-time simulation of an outbreak, called ‘Exercise Blackthorn’.

The simulation exercise will see a series of desk based exercises, known as tabletops, taking place over the next few months and a two day live exercise will take place on 25th and 26th April.

‘Exercise Blackthorn’ will simulate a medium to large scale outbreak that has spread from England to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as within England.

Chief Veterinary Officer Christianne Glossop said:

“Having effective contingency plans are crucial to containing and managing the spread of an outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and it is a requirement of the European Union.

“The effectiveness of our plans must be fully tested so we can establish our current state of readiness for such an outbreak. Exercise Blackthorn will also present an opportunity to identify any issues and improvements in the policies, plans, instructions and procedures we employ in managing an outbreak of the disease.”