

First Minister meets with First Secretary

The First Minister began the meeting by expressing his support for the Prime Minister's criticism of President Trump. There was agreement around the table that no truck could be given to any propagation of hate propaganda.

On Brexit, both sides recognised that progress had been made since the last meeting. A detailed discussion about future frameworks was positive and demonstrated a developing and serious attempt to resolve differences.

There are clearly still obstacles to overcome before the Welsh Government can recommend supporting the Withdrawal Bill, and it was acknowledged that there are opportunities for the UK government to make changes to the proposed legislation as it passes through Parliament.

The First Minister reiterated his central message that he is not looking to frustrate Brexit, and recognises the importance of respecting the referendum result. However, both the final deal and resulting legislation must reflect the economic and constitutional priorities of Wales.

Pioneer schools report shows journey of improvement

A [report](#) published today shows that the schools feel more supported and confident in their work developing six different Areas of Learning and Experience – the subject areas that will make up the new curriculum to be rolled out from 2022.

Interviews carried out as part of research with the pioneer schools revealed that they felt confident that they understood the aims and objectives of their AoLE groups and were happy with how they were being run. They also felt sufficiently supported to progress independently and work with other schools.

Responding to today's report, Education Secretary Kirsty Williams said:

“Our Pioneer Schools are at the heart of the process of designing the new curriculum. That's why it's so important for us to listen to their views and act on them accordingly.

“There will always be challenges when introducing a new curriculum but it's encouraging to know that schools are feeling confident and

supported in taking this vital work forwards. There is a clear sense of momentum here and it demonstrates that our approach is the right one.

“We will continue to monitor progress, listen on where and how we can improve and ensure that the curriculum is fully fit for purpose when we start rolling it out in 2022.”

New teaching standards for further education and work-based learning workforce

The [standards](#) will set high expectations for all practitioners and be more explicit about the role of high-quality collaborative professional learning to support improvements. They reflect the importance of ongoing professional learning for staff and the role vocational learning plays in creating the skilled, innovative and adaptable workforce Wales needs.

Speaking at the conference, Eluned Morgan Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning said:

“Vocational learning is every bit as important as academic education and if we want the best for our vocational learners their teachers, tutors and assessors have to be supported in their role. These new standards set out a clear, aspirational framework for the sector to work to.

“The critical principle of vocational education is that those working in both FE and WBL tend to operate as dual professionals, as experts both in a ‘vocation’ and as ‘teachers’. This has been made a central strand throughout the standards.

“I am confident that these standards will further engage and motivate practitioners and their employers in their pursuit for excellence and improved outcomes for all.”

Kelly Edwards Head of Work Based Learning Quality at the National Training Federation Wales said:

“The Work-based Learning sector was delighted to be involved in the development of the new standards. The standards will support professional learning for WBL practitioners, with a key focus on

developing the dual professional. We welcome the standards as an important step to enhance professional recognition for the WBL sector in Wales.”

Iestyn Davies, Chief Executive of ColegauCymru, Wales’ post compulsory education charity, added:

“The development of professional standards is a move which is welcomed by ColegauCymru. Further Education provides the practical skills and knowledge that communities rely upon, we fully endorse and will promote these standards as a way of ensuring that the public and the profession alike are clear on what is required to continue to deliver world class skills in the rapidly changing world of work.”

Harmful drinkers will see biggest impact from minimum unit price for alcohol – new research shows

In October, the Welsh Government unveiled a new Bill that will, if passed by the National Assembly for Wales, introduce a minimum price for the sale of alcohol. The Bill is designed to tackle the health impacts of excessive alcohol consumption.

The Sheffield Alcohol Research Group at the University of Sheffield were commissioned by the Welsh Government in June 2017 to update the 2014 model-based appraisal of the likely impact of a range of minimum unit pricing policies in Wales.

The research published today is an interim report which updates the modelling undertaken by the University of Sheffield in 2014, and provides an analysis of the health impacts of a 50 pence minimum unit price, as an illustrative example, for comparison with that used in the 2014 report.

The research shows that harmful drinkers purchase almost half (46%) of their alcohol for less than 50p per unit. They account for 4% of the drinker population, they drink 27% of, and are responsible for 20% of all spending on, all alcohol consumed in Wales.

In contrast, moderate drinkers purchase less than a quarter (22%) of their alcohol for less than 50p per unit which means it is estimated moderate drinkers would only spend £8.30 extra per year under a 50p MUP.

The research also shows:

- A 50p MUP is estimated to avoid 66 deaths and 1,281 hospital admissions per year
- Harmful drinkers in the most deprived areas make up 0.6% of the drinker population, the modelling estimates that they will experience 45% of the averted alcohol-attributable deaths and 24% of the averted alcohol-attributable hospital admissions
- Almost three quarters of drinkers drink within the UK Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of 14 units/week, however 24% of drinkers are drinking at potentially hazardous levels (14-50 units/week for men and 14-35 for women), and over 4% are harmful drinkers (over 50 units/week for men and 35 for women)
- Very little alcohol is sold in the on-trade (pubs and restaurants) at below the example 50p MUP threshold (less than 1% of all sales), but a significant proportion of off-trade (off-licences) alcohol is (46%), and overall 37% of all units drunk are bought for less than 50p.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

"This research is further evidence that there is a very clear and direct link between levels of excessive drinking and the availability of cheap alcohol.

"The introduction of a minimum unit price will have a clear impact on those who drink harmful and hazardous levels of cheap, strong alcohol. It is also expected to make an important contribution to addressing health inequalities by improving the health outcomes of hazardous and harmful drinkers living in the most deprived areas of Wales.

"All alcohol-attributable deaths are avoidable deaths – so by introducing this measure, we will save lives."

Investment for Venue Cymru as Wales attracts business events at global exhibition

Work on refreshing Venue Cymru's offer as a business events venue will begin in May 2018 with a view to work being complete by the end of the year.

Almost £1 million of EU funding has been secured for the development. The project is part of the Welsh Government's EU funded Tourism Attractor Destination programme, led by Visit Wales.

Venue Cymru hosts in excess of 800 separate conference and events every year.

Conwy County Borough Council, owners of Venue Cymru recognised that the remodeling of key spaces within the complex was critical to ensure that Venue Cymru could evolve with the needs of this important market, and attract further business events to Wales.

A programme of reconfiguration of the current building will allow for better use of the existing space to accommodate the varied programme of shows and events; with the improved quality of the offer attracting more visitors to North Wales and Venue Cymru, helping to extend the visitor season.

Tourism Minister, Dafydd Elis-Thomas, said:

“This investment in Venue Cymru is a welcome recognition of the importance of the centre to the business events sector in north Wales – and investment is critical in order for us to have the variety and quality of facilities and attractions that the market demands.

“Wales currently attracts under 2% of the value of business conferences and meetings for the UK as a whole but there is significant potential to draw events from UK and international associations, public & third sector meetings, corporate meetings and team building events to Wales’s award-winning venues and business destinations. Business Events are a priority for the Welsh Government, with one of the extended benefits of this market being the high percentage of delegates subsequently returning to the area for future holidays.

“Wales has built an enviable track record of successfully hosting many of the world’s biggest events. We’re now looking at building on our experience to attract more leading business events to Wales – our attendance at global events such as ibtm world is key in setting out our ambition as real players in this market and to raise Wales’ profile as a business events destination.”

Conwy’s Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Cllr Louise Emery added:

“We are delighted the Welsh Government has recognised the importance of this exciting project. Venue Cymru already contributes more than £33m per annum to the North Wales economy supporting hundreds of jobs. This development will help us build on this, further growing Conwy’s valuable business tourism and events offer.”

Visit Wales is exhibiting at ibtm world with industry partners from Wales: Cardiff, ICC Wales and the Vale Resort. ibtm world is the global event for the business events/conferences/meetings sector and the Welsh Government has

recently announced a new business events approach with the ambition of attracting major business conferences and events to Wales.