

Wales calls on UK Government to do more to support onshore wind and solar development

The Welsh Government together with a large number of Welsh energy and environmental organisations are today making a public statement of continuing support for renewable energy.

The statement builds on the Cabinet Secretary's recently announced targets for renewable energy and urges the UK Government to enable onshore wind and solar technologies to compete in renewable energy generation auction rounds.

Currently renewable energy generation auction rounds, termed Contract for Difference, secure subsidies for technologies including offshore, marine renewables and biomass. The auctions specifically exclude onshore wind and solar, which potentially provide the biggest opportunity for the Welsh renewable energy sector.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"The UK has invested over £9 billion in developing the renewables sector and costs have successfully been driven down.

"However, the rapid changes in UK Government policy have decimated large parts of the renewable sector, with potentially valuable developments to Wales stopped in their tracks by UK Ministers. In 2015 alone, four new wind developments in mid-Wales with an installed capacity of over 300MW were refused by UK Government.

"The bulk of UK Government renewables investment is now going to offshore projects outside of Wales. This investment is paid for by Welsh bill payers, amongst others.

"We believe that lowest cost technologies, such as onshore wind and solar, present the best opportunities to manage the costs of generation to energy bills. They also offer Welsh businesses and our rural economy the opportunity to be more resilient and self sufficient in a future outside of the EU.

"The statement of support we, along with key Welsh organisations, have published today, calls for change. That is why we are urging the UK Government to do more to support onshore wind and solar development.

"A policy framework which enables the most affordable projects to continue to form the bulk of energy supply is fundamentally important to delivering our decarbonisation and prosperity goals."

Be The Spark – More than £5m for new activity to support entrepreneurship in Wales

The Welsh Government, partly funded by the European Regional Development Fund will invest over £4m and work with academia, industry and local partners to support the establishment of four new Business Hubs.

The new hubs based in North West Wales, Mid Wales, the South West Valleys and the South East Valleys will aim to kick start and sustain increased innovation driven entrepreneurial activity in their areas.

The establishment of the new hubs follows work already underway to develop the Wrexham Business Hub, which is expected to create 100 new enterprises and 260 new jobs over the next two years.

All five hubs will provide individuals and companies with the space to network, innovate, establish their enterprises and access a range of support services such as business “angels”, advice on pitching, work shops and business surgeries.

Collectively the five hubs will aim to create at least 700 new enterprises and 1160 new jobs, with many of those jobs expected to pay above the average salary for Wales.

In addition to the funding for the hubs, the Economy Secretary has also announced £1m for community entrepreneurship projects which will specifically target people living in less advantaged communities around Wales.

These projects, delivered in the heart of the community, will enable individuals to explore how being self employed can benefit and affect their lives and will help them to generate and develop workable business ideas, overcome barriers and develop transferable skills.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“We know that supporting and encouraging entrepreneurship across Wales is absolutely crucial if we are to succeed in growing Wales’ economy.

“This additional entrepreneurship funding will enable us to develop four new business hubs in North West Wales, Mid Wales, the South West Valleys and the South East Valleys.

“The hubs will be in addition to the Wrexham business hub already being established and will ensure that budding entrepreneurs in all

parts of Wales can access the space and help they need to get their ideas off the ground.

“Evidence tells us that this collaborative approach will bring a host of wider benefits to areas surrounding the hubs which can only be good news for the regional economies of Wales.

“I am also pleased to announce around £1m for community entrepreneurship projects.

“This funding will be used assist and develop budding entrepreneurs who might need a bit more help in clarifying and developing their self employment plans.

“I hope that this specialised support, delivered in the heart of some of our least advantaged communities will provide the advice and development needed to develop a whole new cohort of successful and driven entrepreneurs.”

Welsh Government expands overseas operations to boost trade post-Brexit

The Welsh Government will open offices in Canada, France, Germany and Qatar next year to help protect existing markets, pursue new trade and investment opportunities and promote Wales to the world.

Germany and France are Wales' 2 biggest European markets in terms of trade and investment. A quarter of all Welsh exports go to Germany, worth £2.9bn last year alone, while 90 German companies are based in Wales employing over 12,000 people.

France is Wales' second biggest export destination, with the value of Welsh exports to France standing at £1.9bn in 2016. In addition, there are an estimated 80 French-owned companies in Wales employing over 8,100 people.

For the year ending June 2017, Canada was the 9th largest market for Welsh exports with a value of £392m, an increase of almost 70% over the previous 12 months. Canada is also in Wales' top 5 investing markets, with companies such as Montreal-headquartered CGI having offices in Wales.

The Middle East is a growing commercial market which has seen strong growth as an export destination for Welsh companies. Last year, Qatar was the 15th largest market for Welsh exports, worth £172m to the Welsh economy, which is an increase of over 15% on the previous year.

Wales has achieved record-breaking inward investment results for 3 years

running, attracting major companies – including GE Aviation and General Dynamics – against the backdrop of Brexit and competition from the largest economies in the world.

Welsh Government overseas teams promote Wales as a potential investment destination and have helped secure some Wales' largest foreign investments.

For Welsh exporters, Welsh Government's overseas teams play a role in investment decisions, providing knowledge of markets and trends, business climate and culture as well as ways to win new business. Overseas teams also offer access to networks and businesses and facilitate connections with influencers and decision makers.

During a major speech this evening at Cardiff Met University on Wales after Brexit, the First Minister will say:

“Increasing our presence in these key markets allows us to pursue new trade and investment opportunities, build networks and promote Wales to the world. This has never been more important as we face a future outside of the European Union.

“Leaving the EU will create challenges, as well as opportunities. That is why we are expanding our presence in Europe and across the globe, so we are able to meet with, and attract, new investors and sell Welsh goods to overseas customers.

“As well as identifying new and exciting opportunities, we are working hard to protect our existing markets. Two thirds of Welsh exports go to European countries, while a third of all Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) comes from the EU.

“If we turn our backs on the Single Market and shut ourselves off from vital European trading markets, it would be hugely damaging to our economy. Maintaining and increasing investment from companies already in Wales is vitally important to us and dedicated resource in these countries will maximise the investment opportunities that these markets bring.”

“We will work with our farmers to help them meet the challenges of Brexit,” says Lesley Griffiths

In a keynote speech at the Hybu Cig Cymru breakfast, the Cabinet Secretary

will talk about a number of important initiatives the Welsh Government has in place to provide valuable support to farmers, many of which are particularly relevant as the UK leaves the EU and farm businesses prepare for the major change that lies ahead.

A new land capability mapping system for Wales will be launched by the Cabinet Secretary at this year's Winter Fair – the first major update since the original maps were produced in the early 1970's. The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Map allows land users, planners and Government to make informed choices about how agricultural land is used in Wales.

The Cabinet Secretary will also announce that over 91% of farmers' Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) 2017 claims will be paid on Friday (1st December). Over £201m will be paid into the bank accounts of 14,111 Welsh farm businesses on the first day on which payments may be made under European rules.

Speaking ahead of the Winter Fair Lesley Griffiths said:

“Brexit will bring significant and lasting change, of that there is absolutely no doubt. A ‘no deal’ scenario presents particularly acute risks for those sectors particularly reliant on exports to the EU including lamb.

“Leaving the Common Agricultural Policy and new, yet to be established, trading arrangements mean that maintaining the status quo is simply not an option. Turning challenges into opportunities is where the industry and individual farm businesses need to be focusing their attention.

“For our part, we are already heavily involved working alongside our key partners in seeking to address our agriculture sectors’ readiness for Brexit.

“Brexit will provide a once in a generation opportunity to redesign our policy framework in a way that is uniquely Welsh, that reflects Welsh needs and strengths.

“We all have a role to play shaping how the industry will look after Brexit and we need farmers to be bold, imaginative; open to new ideas and practices.

“With this new approach in mind, I’m pleased to today launch a new Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map for Wales. It identifies the potential versatility of land to support a range of cropping choices and allows land users, planners and Government to make informed choices on how land is used.

“My priority is to ensure our agricultural industry is in the best possible position to deal with the change ahead. As a government we are committed to providing solutions which work for Wales and we will continue to work with the industry, our partners and others to

make the most of every opportunity.”

On the record payment of Basic Payment Scheme claims, the Cabinet Secretary added:

“I am delighted to announce that over 91% of farmers receiving their BPS payments on the first day. This is yet another example of the success of our uniquely Welsh approach and our exemplary record on payments. It is a tribute to the way Welsh farmers have embraced new technology, RPW Online and made the new system such a success.”

[Google for Education to be rolled out in Welsh schools next year](#)

The new software is a direct result of feedback from schools and will be made available through Hwb – the digital learning platform for Wales which provides a range of centrally-funded, bilingual digital tools and resources.

Latest statistics for October 2017 show that there were a total of 736,813 log-ins to Hwb during the month – a 55% increase over October 2016 – which equates to an average of over 23,000 log-ins every day.

As well as announcing plans for the roll-out of Google for Education, the Cabinet Secretary also provided an update on other areas of the Learning in Digital Wales (LiDW) programme.

This included progress on investing in School Broadband – a Taking Wales Forward commitment to provide superfast broadband to all schools in Wales.

This will provide fibre connections for 343 schools across Wales via the PSBA network and will ensure schools are able to access the range of tools and resources available via Hwb, as well as supporting the new curriculum.

Today the Cabinet Secretary announced that to date, over a third of targeted schools have been upgraded to faster speeds.

Guidance will also be published shortly to help schools understand how local area network issues can affect their internet connectivity and how they can make the best use of investment from the LiDW programme.

Kirsty Williams said:

“We want our teachers to have access to the best digital tools and resources and the best quality superfast broadband.

“We have listened to the feedback we’ve been receiving from schools and I’m very pleased that, as a result of their feedback, we will be rolling out Google for Education in 2018.

“This will give our teachers a much wider range of digital tools and resources and will lead to greater collaboration and communication within the classroom.”

As a result of ongoing feedback, the Welsh Government will also not be renewing the Hwb+ virtual learning platform once the current contract expires in August 2018.

Schools, local authorities and regional education consortia will be contacted to ensure they are ready to take advantage of the new digital tools and can make the transition from the Hwb+ platform next year.

Liz Sproat from Google for Education said:

“We congratulate the Welsh Government for their commitment to provide the very best education to learners across Wales. We’re delighted that Google’s education tools will be made available to schools via the Hwb platform and look forward to supporting them on their journey with us.”