

Welsh Government support for Airbus unwavering – Minister for North Wales

That was the message from Minister for Economy and Minister for North Wales, Ken Skates following a visit to the company in Broughton yesterday.

Airbus is the largest employer in Wales with 6,000 employees and Welsh Government support over the last twenty years has helped develop the Broughton site in Deeside into one of the most advanced wing and aerospace manufacturing facilities in the world.

The company has also been confirmed as the first tenant of Wales' new flagship Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility which will be managed by The University of Sheffield Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC). The Welsh Government is investing £20m to develop the first phase of the facility and Airbus has a longstanding working relationship with the AMRC.

The Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility, which is being constructed just off Chester Road in Broughton, will be vital in helping increase productivity, commercialisation, innovation and skills development across a range of sectors including Aerospace.

Brexit was a key topic of discussion during the visit and Ken Skates stated the Welsh Government's continued commitment to give the company a sustainable future and keep good quality jobs in the region.

The Minister also complimented Airbus' Apprenticeship programme during his visit which has provided opportunities to hundreds of individuals in a range of roles.

Ken Skates said:

"Airbus is a vitally important company in North Wales and makes a huge contribution to the Welsh economy financially, through significant employment, skills development, fantastic apprenticeships and supply chain opportunities. The difference the company makes to the region and the country as a whole cannot be underestimated.

"We are continuing to work collaboratively and constructively with Airbus and I am pleased they will be the first company through the door of the new Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility. The aim of the facility is to provide a real step change in business support to encourage and increase collaboration between industry, academic partners and entrepreneurs and it is predicted that the first phase of the facility alone could drive up Welsh GVA (gross value added) by as much as £4bn over 20 years.

"Brexit was of course a topic that was high up on our agenda and

while the UK Government's approach to leaving the EU means businesses are still left with uncertainty and unanswered questions, I reiterated the Welsh Government's absolute commitment to continuing our longstanding partnership with Airbus and doing all we can to support them. This was demonstrated in September when we allocated the company £3 million from our EU Transition Fund to help with its preparations for Brexit.

"Let me be clear that the Welsh Government is not standing still because of the Brexit dilemma. We will continue to nurture our close relationship with Airbus and will do all in our power to maximise employment opportunities, create new jobs and support the company in growing its base in Broughton."

European commission recognises importance of Compound Semiconductors by unlocking up to €1.75 billion for industry research and innovation

The plan will unlock €1.75bn of funding for research activities, will bring in up to €6bn in private investment and will ultimately help bring new technology innovations to market.

The project is the first integrated research, development and innovation IPCEI programme to be approved by the Commission, highlighting the European importance of microelectronics and compound semiconductors.

It is expected to benefit both the Welsh and the wider UK economy by establishing South East Wales as the leading centre of compound semiconductor expertise.

The UK element of the pan-European joint microelectronics research and innovation project was driven by the Welsh Government and involves three Welsh companies: IQE, Newport Wafer Fab and SPTS Technologies (an Orbotech company), along with Manchester based ICS Ltd.

Economy Minister, Ken Skates said:

"Wales' semiconductor cluster and its contribution to many of the technologies that are so prevalent in our modern everyday lives is a real source of pride, and I am delighted Wales has taken the lead on behalf of the UK in co-ordinating this project that will drive

vital research and accelerate innovation work across Europe.

The EU's decision to approve the plan is huge news for the sector and of course for Wales' wider economy, paving the way for up to £6 billion of private investment throughout Europe and enabling our own semiconductor companies to work alongside international giants in their field.

We look forward to working closely with our European partners and IQE, Newport Wafer Fab and SPTS on this exciting work and will do all we can to deliver the very best outcome for Wales."

Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, in charge of Digital Economy and Society said:

"Every connected device, every modern machine, all our digital services depend on microelectronic components that become smaller and faster with time. If we don't want to depend on others for such essential technology, for example for security or performance reasons, we have to be able to design and produce them ourselves. The decision to approve the project is a result of enhanced cooperation and shared European vision."

Compound semiconductors are widely expected to revolutionise twenty-first century technologies as the silicon chip changed the latter half of the twentieth century.

The UK is already home to a number of state of the art businesses and research facilities in the compound semiconductor space with a particular concentration in Wales.

The South Wales semiconductor cluster – branded as CSconnected, is rapidly being recognised as a leading centre for enabling technologies powered by compound semiconductors.

It is further supported by the surrounding region which boasts a range of facilities and businesses that support high-tech supply chains, from research and development through to innovative solutions .

As a result of the ruling IQE, Newport Wafer Fab, SPTS Technologies and ICS Ltd will collaborate with partners across many other countries on the Important Project of Common European Interest (IPCEI) that will focus on first deployment and innovation activities.

Housing First supporting people to leave homelessness behind

There she saw how the team are supporting people to move off the streets into housing.

Housing First is designed to support people who need significant levels of help to move away from homelessness. People receiving support are offered a place to live and then offered tailored, long term support to help enable them to manage a tenancy independently.

Last month, the Minister announced over £548,000 for the Salvation Army and Cardiff Council for two projects to work closely in the capital. Cardiff Council are establishing a new Housing First pilot to run alongside the existing Salvation Army pilot project, meeting demand locally. Since the Salvation Army's project began, not only have they supported eight people into tenancies, but their help has resulted in none of the eight people having been admitted to A&E.

Julie James said:

“The fantastic team here in Cardiff are supporting people to live independently. I was able to speak with Chris and hear how this approach is helping him to move forward with his life.

“Housing First can help people who are homeless and who often have complex needs including mental illness, problems with drug and alcohol abuse, poor physical health and a lack of a wider support network.

“This approach provides people with flexible support for as long as they need it and focuses on what that person might need to recover and live independently.

“This project is supporting some of the most vulnerable people in Wales to move away from living on our streets. I share the determination of everyone here at the Salvation Army, across the local authorities and charities working to tackle homelessness and improve the lives of people who find themselves without a secure, suitable home.

“We know that this not the right approach for everyone who is homeless – there is still a need for supported housing and temporary accommodation. However, projects like this one in Cardiff can play an important role in supporting people, particularly those who have been sleeping rough for a long time, to be able to sustain a tenancy.”

Yvonne Connolly, Regional Manager for The Salvation Army's Homelessness Services Unit Wales and the South West said:

"It was a pleasure to discuss with the Minister the ground-breaking results that have been achieved by the Housing First Cardiff programme with some of the most marginalised and hard to reach people in our capital city.

"Housing First is a lifelong model which supports individuals out of rough sleeping by first making them a tenant in their own home and intensive, assertive and flexible support to maintain tenure of the property is offered throughout."

Housing First Projects are designed to ensure that the individual has choice and control – they are actively encouraged to engage with support services such as mental health or substance abuse, but they are not required to do so in return for support.

Learners to experience new languages at an earlier age – Kirsty Williams

In the new curriculum, Modern Foreign Languages would be included within International Languages. This would also include community languages, classical languages and British Sign Language (BSL).

Learners would experience international languages at an earlier age and there would be clear expectations for their progress while at primary school.

This will build on work with the Global Futures Network, which provides a range of support for Modern Foreign Languages in the curriculum.

Schools would be able to choose which language (s) they would like learners to experience in addition to Welsh and English.

Changes are also proposed to the way that Welsh is taught, with the language remaining compulsory for all learners aged 3-16 – alongside English – but no longer separated into first and second language Programmes of Study.

Under the proposals, all learners will follow the same curriculum and there would be more of an emphasis on improving learners' skills and use of the language.

While it would be up to schools to decide how they approach this, they would need to think about opportunities for learners to listen, read, speak and write in Welsh – this might be through use in different parts of the

curriculum or outside the classroom.

Work is already underway with regional consortia and other stakeholders to deliver professional learning in a number of ways, including the Sabbatical Scheme which provides intensive Welsh language training to teachers and teaching assistants.

In the longer-term, qualifications for Welsh, English and International Languages would also change. Qualifications Wales are currently considering how qualifications should change in line with the new curriculum.

Announcing the changes today, the Education Minister said:

“This marks the most dramatic shift in the way languages are taught in Welsh schools since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988.

“We want all our learners to be citizens of both Wales and the world and that means ensuring that all young people from all backgrounds have an opportunity to develop their language skills – whether that’s in Welsh, English or international languages.

“We know these changes will take time and that’s why we won’t be taking a big bang approach. We’re committed to giving schools the time and resources they need to adjust. That’s why I recently announced £24 million over and above what already goes into curriculum support.”

Professor Sioned Davies, author of a Welsh Government commissioned report into Welsh in the curriculum, said:

“I am very pleased that the Welsh Government is fulfilling the recommendations of my report. Ensuring that the Welsh language is a statutory subject for everyone, and removing the term ‘Welsh second language’ is vital if we are to achieve the goal of a million Welsh speakers.

“The new curriculum, which will bring language learning together into one Area of Learning and Experience, will provide an exciting opportunity for teachers in Wales to develop and share expertise in language learning to give our children and young people the best opportunity to develop communication skills in Welsh and English, and in international languages.

“These are exciting and challenging times. There is a need to ensure time and support for the whole system to develop in order to create the best conditions for the new curriculum to flourish.”

A Curriculum and Assessment White Paper is to be published for consultation

shortly. This will set out the proposed changes that are needed to support the introduction of the new Curriculum when the phased roll out commences from 2022.

Kirsty Williams to meet University Ministers to discuss the future of higher education

The Minister convened and will chair the meeting with Scotland's Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Richard Lochhead, and Chris Skidmore MP, the UK Government's Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation. Officials from the Northern Ireland Executive will also be present at the meeting in Cardiff.

As well as preparations for Brexit and its implications on the HE sector, the Ministers are also expected to discuss the UK Government's forthcoming Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, led by Philip Augar.

Kirsty Williams said:

"This meeting comes at an absolutely crucial time for our Higher Education sector, as well as the many EU staff and students vital to our universities. Our universities and colleges make a significant contribution to our economy in Wales, employing around 29,000 people, and benefit greatly from our EU membership.

"I've been very clear our higher education institutions need urgent clarity on a number of critical issues, including their engagement in EU-led research schemes, their participation in Erasmus+ and the right of EU nationals working in our universities to continue to do so.

"I've already announced £3.5 million for a programme run by Wales' universities to drive international partnerships and promote Wales as a study destination in a post Brexit world.

"I welcome the opportunity to work with my counterparts to ensure our colleges and universities are not disadvantaged and do not lose a single penny as a result of Brexit."