

Skills and Science Minister outlines Welsh Government's plans for Employability in Wales

This is the message from Skills and Science Minister, Julie James, today as she outlines her agenda for employability in Wales after being given a mandate by Cabinet to lead on employability across the Welsh Government.

The move comes as part of the Welsh Government's '[Taking Wales Forward](#)' commitment to re-shape employability support for job-ready individuals and those furthest from the labour market to help them acquire the skills and experience needed to gain and maintain sustainable employment.

As part of that commitment the Welsh Government is developing an Employability Delivery Plan and associated programmes, which will connect and join up with a range of other policies across the organisation to ensure a more integrated approach to employability is delivered; one that is better suited to the needs of the people and businesses of Wales.

The Minister, Julie James, is keen to point out that steps are already being taken to introduce new measures to support the development of the delivery plan and will announce today that, in addition to being given a mandate by Cabinet to lead on employability across the Welsh Government to help support more people into and to remain in work, she is also:

- establishing a new cross-Welsh Government Board to lead on the development of the Employability Delivery Plan
- drawing up an External Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Plan which will feed into the cross-Welsh Government Board and include representation from key partners to ensure a more integrated approach to employability.

Furthermore, the Minister has confirmed:

- the Employability Delivery Plan will be published before the end of this year
- the Employability programmes will be called 'Working Wales'.

Highlighting how the work of the [Valleys Task Force](#) is also helping to inform the development of the Employability Delivery Plan, the Minister said:

"We have seen significant improvements in the employment rate in Wales over recent years. There are now over 1.4 million people in employment in Wales, an increase of 19.1% since devolution but we also know that the rate of unemployment still remains high in some communities across Wales.

"Whilst Welsh Government's contribution to the positive overall

rate of employment, supported with EU funding, should not be underestimated, we know the story is not a wholly positive one and we must do more to support the economically inactive, those who would like to work longer hours and those in insecure employment.

“Indeed addressing employability has been a key element of our discussions through the Valleys Task Force but we also recognise there is a sense of urgency to bring jobs and growth to communities across Wales that need more of both and that is exactly what we hope to achieve by re-shaping our employability support.”

The Employability Delivery Plan for Wales will be published before the end of 2017 with a view to the new delivery programmes coming into effect in April 2019.

This will be positioned as a single employability offer under the name Working Wales and will be underpinned by a new programme for adults along with two new programmes that will deliver employability support to young people.

Between now and April 2019 the Welsh Government will reconfigure its existing programmes to enable a smooth transition, using the Valleys as a test bed to inform the new delivery approach.

Amendments to existing employability programmes, including the EU-funded ReAct, Jobs Growth Wales and the Employability Skills Programme, will be made to ensure that these are effectively aligned to the new offer to enhance support for unemployed people and those who churn in and out of temporary, poorly paid employment.

Julie James added:

“We are keen to promote prosperity for all so that the benefits of economic growth are shared by all those in work. This includes ensuring that we reach those furthest from the labour market and provide them with a holistic package of personalised, bespoke and intensive support and mentoring to reduce complex barriers to employment, tackle levels of economic inactivity and deliver on our ambition of developing prosperity for all. We can only truly achieve this through better aligned support brought about by working effectively across Government.

“If we are to shape a new employability agenda, we need to drive a coherent approach across Welsh Government and with our partners to address the many barriers preventing people from entering and progressing in good quality, fair employment. This approach will benefit individuals across Wales and deliver the prosperous and secure future that we need to Take Wales Forward.”

“Health and social care services have to change”, says expert panel

To turn this ambition into practical reality, it calls for new models of care to be trialed across Wales.

Frontline staff, the public, and other public and voluntary organisations will be asked to work together to develop new models of care, to help hospital, primary care, community health and social care providers to work more effectively together. The models will be developed to work in different settings such as urban and rural, and take account of Welsh language needs.

The Parliamentary Review interim report, published today, recognises that new models will need to be underpinned by action in a number of areas and makes further recommendations including the need for:

- a step change in the way the health and social care systems adapts to the changing needs of the population
- the people of Wales, staff, service users and carers to have greater influence on new models of care with clearer, shared roles and responsibilities
- new skills and career paths for the health and social care workforce with a focus on continuous improvement
- better use of technology and infrastructure to support quality and efficiency
- streamlined governance, finance and accountability arrangements aligned for health and social care.

The review panel has been asked to produce a report by the end of 2017. The final report will consider ways of meeting rising need for health and social care as well as public expectations about the services. The review panel has been actively engaging with the public and health and care professionals to seek their honest and frank opinions on the future of health and social care in Wales.

Dr Ruth Hussey said:

“In our independent interim report we have focused on the challenges to, and the opportunities for, improvement in the current services. The report defines the key issues facing health and social care services as we see them and outlines our initial proposals for a way forward.

“By the time our final report is published at the end of the year, we aim to have a list of recommendations that command widespread support, are implementable, and give Wales the best chance of

delivering the changes needed to achieve quality driven, sustainable, whole health and social care system and services that the population rightfully expects.”

“We want to hear from as many people as possible to inform the next part of our work, especially on the case for change, new models, and the areas we have identified for action.”

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“I’d like to thank Dr Hussey, her team and everyone who has contributed to this report so far. I also welcome the cross-party support for the review.

“The establishment of the Parliamentary Review into the Long-Term Future of Health and Social Care in Wales was a key commitment in Taking Wales Forward.

“This is an insightful interim report. The panel rightly recognises the tremendous commitment of the health and care workforce, and its significant achievements. However, the case for change in how health and care services should be organised in future could not be clearer.

“I look forward to responding formally to Assembly Members in the chamber later today.”

London gets the legendary treatment

A Visit Wales marketing campaign will see a huge motion screen at Waterloo station to showcase Wales at its best with a specially edited film which will also bring some serenity and calm to London’s busiest rail station, with 250,000 people travelling through Waterloo each day.

Following the recent Lonely Planet accolade, where North Wales was named in the list of the Top 10 Regions for 2017, North Wales Tourism – working with the six Destination Management Partnerships in the area – were successful in securing support from the Visit Wales Tourism Product Innovation Fund (TPIF) to deliver an innovative campaign in London to raise awareness of North Wales as a destination and to capitalise on this great award and recognition by Lonely Planet.

During July and August six London taxis will be ‘wrapped’ to create an impression the driver is on a surf board or flying down a zip wire. For the first four weeks of the campaign, a bus on a central London route will also

be fully wrapped. To support the campaign Radio X will run a digital and airtime competition for listeners to win a 3 night break in North Wales to experience first hand the range of adventure and activities on offer.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, said:

“Our aim is to encourage and inspire new visitors to consider Wales as a holiday destination right now, and to continue developing Wales’ reputation as a cool, contemporary, vibrant place to visit, with lots going on. Our summer campaign includes a mixture of TV advertising, digital, press partnerships and out of home advertising in key London underground and rail stations.

“Our message for this campaign is clear – Wales is alive over the summer with legendary experiences, festivals and events. We’ve developed content to showcase Wales’ rich culture, heritage and landscapes and celebrate our wealth of cultural and sporting events and icons. I’m delighted that activity from our north Wales partners is reinforcing the message that a legendary experience awaits in Wales this summer.”

Jim Jones, Managing Director of North Wales Tourism said:

“We’re delighted that this funding from Visit Wales has enabled us to work with partners on a London and South East campaign. Our aim is to raise the profile of the Lonely Planet recognition, but to also draw attention to just how close we are from London.”

The Visit Wales campaign also includes TV advertising with the Year of Legends campaign film starring Luke Evans being shown on Channel 4 in London as well as on Sky Regional London and Sky Adsmart Meridian. Print adverts, cover wraps and editorial features will be appearing in the Evening Standard and the London Metro with printed and digital adverts appearing in 36 rail and underground stations across London.

Consultation on criminal enforcement powers for the Welsh Revenue Authority launched

From April 2018, the Welsh Revenue Authority will be responsible for collecting and managing landfill disposals tax and land transaction tax – the two taxes being devolved to Wales. They will replace landfill tax and stamp

duty land tax, respectively, which are currently collected by HMRC.

HMRC have a wide range of criminal enforcement powers, which help it to tackle and deter tax crime, in relation to stamp duty land tax and landfill tax.

The consultation being launched today asks for views about the advantages and disadvantages of the WRA having a similar set of criminal enforcement powers for land transaction tax and landfill disposals tax but with some differences in scope.

For example, powers of arrest and detention are not proposed as they are not regarded as necessary or proportionate. However, powers to gain entry to premises and seize information are.

The consultation also sets out the proposed safeguards for citizens.

Launching the consultation, Professor Drakeford said:

“In nine months’ time the Welsh Government will raise our own taxes for the first time in almost 800 years.

“The effective collection of taxes is vital to fund the public services we all rely on. To protect these services, it is important we have a tax system that is fair – making it easy for people to pay the right amount of tax at the right time, while tackling and deterring those who seek to evade paying tax.

“That is why I am today launching this consultation about proposals to ensure the Welsh Revenue Authority has the right and proportionate criminal investigative powers in place to tackle and deter devolved tax crime.

“No government should legislate to provide a public authority with criminal powers unless it is necessary. HMRC currently uses criminal powers in Wales to tackle and deter tax crime in relation to the two taxes being devolved in April and has a clearly-defined set of safeguards to ensure those powers are used proportionately and appropriately. I believe the WRA should be no different.

“The devolution of taxes brings with it new duties – one of which is to protect the interests of law abiding citizens by tackling those who would seek to evade their responsibilities.

“I urge everyone with an interest to get involved and share their views with us on this important issue.”

Optimum Credit expands its Cardiff operations with Welsh Government support

The company has built up a loan portfolio of over £275m through a network of specialist third party mortgage brokers and now plan to build a retail channel lending directly to customers.

Optimum Credit was established in late 2013 with £600,000 business finance from the Welsh Government and backing from Patron Capital Partners – a private equity real estate investment house and one of the leading real estate managers in Europe.

Welsh Government funding was for the creation of create 44 jobs over five years – the company has exceeded all targets and currently employs 82 at its offices in Dumfries Place.

The company's expansion is supported by £140K from the Welsh Government's Growth and Prosperity Fund to create a further 23 jobs and will, in turn, trigger further investment into the company from Patron Capital Partners.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Optimum Credit is very much a made-in-Wales success story. The business has undergone rapid growth in a short time to take the number one position as the UK's largest lender in the second mortgage market.

“This is quite an achievement in what is a highly competitive market and the company now plan to build on that success by offering their bespoke priced products directly to customers.

“I am delighted the Welsh Government is supporting their next stage of growth that will enable them to take advantage of new opportunities and create more well paid, highly skilled jobs.

“Optimum Credit is a prime example of the innovative, high growth companies and established national and international centres in the financial and professional service sector that have chosen to invest and grow their businesses in Wales.”

Ian Praed, Optimum Credit's Chief Operating Officer said;

“We're delighted to continue our positive relationship with the Welsh Government in the further development of Optimum here in Cardiff. From the original start up support provided via their

Growth and Prosperity Fund we have created over 80 jobs to date and look forward to adding to this number as we develop and roll out our direct to consumer proposition.”

A retail sales capability will enable Optimum Credit to expand its product range and interact with customers using their channels of choice, delivering through the internet and mobile technology.