

Innovative products keep Wales competitive in global marketplace

- Over 1 million international visits to Wales in 2016 with record-breaking spend
- Industry leaders gather for Tourism Summit to discuss future challenges
- £2 million announced for projects to celebrate Year of Legends and Year of the Sea
- The Wales Way will be launched during Year of Legends while 2019 is named as Year of Discovery.

The number of international visits to Wales in 2016 was 1.074 million, and the associated spend was £444 million.

This is the first time since 2008 that Wales has attracted over a million international visits, while these are the highest spend figures ever recorded for Wales.

The news comes as leaders from the tourism industry in Wales and the UK have gathered for a Tourism Summit, organised by Visit Wales, to discuss future trends and challenges for the industry.

The Economy Secretary, Ken Skates, said:

“The tourism Industry in Wales is in very good shape. And the fact that we saw record breaking spend from overseas visitors last year and crossed the million visitors for the first time in 8 years is excellent news. We fully recognise how competitive the market is and the challenges facing the industry. Our future vision – especially in light of the EU Referendum result – is to do more again to build on this sense of confidence and to internationalise our reputation and approach.”

The first of Wales’ themed years was a great success, Visit Wales marketing activity for 2016 generated an additional £370 million for the Welsh economy – which is an 18% increase on 2015. This shows visitors were definitely influenced by Visit Wales marketing before taking a trip to Wales. Today, the Cabinet Secretary announced the continuation of the themed years with a new ‘Year of Discovery’ in 2019 which will build on the three themes of adventure, culture and great outdoors.

The main focus of the Tourism Summit – which took place at the Metropole Llandrindod Wells, and was attended by 150 tourism leaders and speakers, was to discuss how Wales can remain vigilant to new emerging trends and changing market conditions.

Innovative projects are key to future success. Today, the Cabinet Secretary announced that £2 million had been approved for a total of 38 projects across

Wales under the Tourism Product Innovation Fund and Regional Tourism Engagement Fund. This funding will enable the private and public sectors to develop innovative projects that will stimulate demand and improve the visitor offer through supporting the Year of Legends campaign while also looking forward to the Year of the Sea.

The Economy Secretary also announced another innovative project which will be launched to visitors at the end of the Year of Legends. 'The Wales Way' will be a new world class family of tourism routes. The Economy Secretary, said:

“Although the routes will be centred around core road networks – which I can confirm will include the A55 Cultural Corridor to the north, the A487 to the west, and the A470 through the heart of Wales – they will be much more than driving routes. They will celebrate various modes of transport, encouraging visitors to discover hidden gems and immerse themselves in local experiences, providing the ‘glue’ that draws together and amplifies our existing tourism offer.”

A period of engagement with key regional and local industry partners and stakeholders will take place over the next few months to ensure that each route represents the very best of the regions.

Every child in Wales to have access to recognised nurse throughout their school education

Each secondary school and their cluster primaries will have an identified school nurse and associated health team with a variety of skills, who will be accessible for support and advice as children progress through their education both within and outside term time.

The new School Nursing Framework is designed to ensure young people receive consistent expert support from a healthcare professional who is familiar with their health and wellbeing needs. The framework provides commitment to a seamless service for health and lifestyle support and advice to all families from birth, provided by midwifery services, through to health visiting and onto school nursing.

School nurses will provide and coordinate health intervention and public health programmes on a range of issues, including:

- Physical health (education on obesity, smoking, alcohol and drug related

harm)

- Promotion of emotional wellbeing and supporting the mental health needs of school age children
- Delivery of the national screening, surveillance and immunisation programmes in the school setting
- Safeguarding
- Early identification and assessment of pupils' needs
- Additional support and/or signposting to local or specialist services for children and young people who are identified as having additional needs

Speaking ahead of a visit to Bae Baglan school in Port Talbot to launch the new School Nursing Framework, Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething, said:

"We want to do everything we can to ensure the health and well being of all children in Wales.

"School nurses make an important contribution to the healthy development of a child and I am pleased that every child in Wales will now have a dedicated school nurse throughout their time at school to ensure that their health and emotional needs are met."

"Happy, healthy children are much more likely to achieve their full potential and grow up to be healthy adults. Investing in our young people is investing in our future."

Education Secretary Kirsty Williams said:

"We want to ensure pupils are aware of what school nurses can do for them and how to find them, to make it easier for children to use the school nursing service and get good advice on their health.

"It's important to emphasise that school nurses are not just responsible for first aid; they're planning and coordinating care for learners with chronic health needs so they can participate in school. They are also facilitators and advocates for lots of children.

"School nursing has to be viewed as further investment in students. Healthy students learn better. School nurses are partners to make sure that happens."

£1m to strengthen how Foundation Phase is delivered in Wales

The Foundation Phase encourages children to be creative and imaginative, making learning more enjoyable and effective. The funding will be used to develop a Foundation Phase Excellence Network, which will support the sharing of effective practice and work closely with the National Networks of Excellence in Science and Technology and Mathematics, which are already being developed.

Recent independent evaluations have shown that where Foundation Phase is being implemented well, it is raising the attainment of all children, but highlighted the need for greater consistency of delivery.

The new excellence network will:

- Help strengthen the links between schools, settings, consortia and local authorities to universities to develop research on professional learning for Foundation Phase practitioners.
- Use global and local evidence to develop nationally recognised Foundation Phase professional learning for staff.
- Support Pioneer Network Schools in the development of and professional learning for the new curriculum.
- Improve children's experiences of the Foundation Phase in settings and schools across Wales.

Minister for Life Long Learning Alun Davies said:

“The evidence shows that the Foundation Phase is working for our youngest pupils, with the majority achieving the expected results for their age.

“I want to make sure we build on this progress and continue to support our young people through their early years to make sure they have the best start in life. This investment will help us develop the skills of those who teach the foundation phase, create new training opportunities and ensure there is consistency across Wales.

Education Secretary Kirsty Williams said:

“The £1m for the Foundation Phase Excellence Network is part of our on-going investment to raise standards across our education system. We want to make sure our pupils have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed and thrive in the modern world.”

Professor Iram Siraj from the Institute of Education, London said,

“The Foundation Phase in Wales is leading in the UK in providing a curriculum and approach which provides true, seamless continuity in children’s learning from the early years to the middle of primary. We have seen a move away from over-formalised and over-controlled classrooms to spaces where experiential learning, enquiry and creativity is valued alongside literacy and numeracy.”

Professor David Egan, Cardiff Metropolitan University said,

“The Foundation Phase Excellence Network is a very welcome step to promoting the excellent learning and teaching practice which should be at the heart of the future development of the curriculum for 3-7 year olds.”

Professor Edward Melhuish, Professor of Human Development, Birkbeck, University of London said,

“The developments to the Foundation Phase have already brought improvements in early years provision for the children of Wales. The new investment in the Foundation Phase Excellence Network promises yet further improvements in professional development that will benefit all.”

Welsh Laverbread achieves protected status

It joins other great Welsh produce, such as Conwy Mussels, Welsh Lamb and Halen Môn/Anglesey Sea Salt, as well as other well-known European products, such as Champagne and Parma Ham, which have been recognised for their distinct quality and awarded protection against imitation and misuse.

Welsh Laverbread is protected by the European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status, which will provide consumers with the confidence they are eating the genuine Welsh product.

In total, 12 Welsh products have now been awarded Protected status.

The Welsh Government has supported Selwyn’s Seafood, based in Penclawdd in the Gower, over the past four years during the complicated and extensive

application process.

Laverbread is a well-known Welsh delicacy recognised both within and outside Wales. Its taste and appearance is affected by the cleanliness and temperature of the sea water, as well as the method of producing it, making it a characteristic of its origin.

Collecting the laver, a type of seaweed, to make Welsh Laverbread was a small cottage industry in Pembrokeshire, dating back to 1800. The laver was thrown over thatched huts to dry before being sold to businesses in Swansea where it was cooked into Welsh Laverbread and sold at local markets.

Welcoming the protected status for Welsh Laverbread, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths said:

“Wales’ reputation for high-quality food and drink continues to go from strength to strength. I am delighted Welsh Laverbread is the latest Welsh product to join our growing list of food and drink awarded protected status. It is very much an icon of Welsh food, which brings to mind its historic origins on the beaches of west Wales.

“Food and drink is a priority sector of the Welsh Government, which is why we have set an ambitious target to grow the sector by 30% by 2020. The recognition from the European Commission is important as it demonstrates the quality of Wales’ unique produce as we strive to reach new markets to grow the industry and prepare for a future outside of the EU.”

Nearly 40,000 jobs supported by Welsh Government as employment in Wales hits record high

Ken Skates confirmed that 38,497 jobs were supported in Wales in 2016/17 as a result of Welsh Government interventions.

Over the same period, 1086 individuals were helped into work through the Welsh Government’s flagship Jobs Growth Wales programme.

The latest figures mean that in 2016/17 the Welsh Government recorded its second best performance on job support in recent years. The figures were second only to 2015/16 when the Welsh Government supported 40,044 jobs.

Ken Skates said:

“Earlier today the First Minister welcomed latest ONS Labour Market statistics that showed the number of people employed in Wales had risen by 25,000 over the last three months, meaning employment levels here now stands at an historic record 73.7 per cent.

“Indeed over the last year the rate of employment in Wales has improved by more than double the UK average.

“The Welsh Government is working tirelessly to drive up employment levels and to support companies across Wales to survive, thrive and expand.

“These latest figures show that our hard work and ambition is paying dividends, with the Welsh Government having supported nearly 80,000 jobs in the last 2 years and around 170,000 jobs over the past five.

“We will continue to support businesses across Wales and ensure we have the right economic conditions to drive up employment levels, support sustainable jobs and training, and spread prosperity right across Wales.”