

International research leader to manage Wales' first Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility

The Welsh Government is investing £20m to develop the first phase of the facility, on Broughton in order to increase productivity, commercialisation, innovation and skills development across a range of sectors including Aerospace and Automotive.

The aim is to take business support to the next level in order to encourage and increase productive collaboration between industry, academic partners and entrepreneurs. It is predicted that the first phase of the new research facility could drive up Welsh GVA (gross value added) by as much as £4bn over 20 years.

Construction of the building located just off Chester Road is being led by Galliford Try and is now well underway. And with the AMRC now confirmed as the organisation that will operate the facility, and Airbus confirmed as the first tenant, it is set to get off to a strong start when doors officially open in 2019.

Economy Secretary Ken Sates said:

“The news that the AMRC will be managing Wales' first Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility on Deeside really is cause for celebration.

“The AMRC has a 15 year record of delivery and has long demonstrated that it has leading industry capability in the delivery of research, manufacturing support and partnership services.

“It has built up incredibly strong relationships with a range of partnerships, from global corporates through to local SMEs and supply chains, and it will play a vital role in developing sustainable, long term leading innovation and skills. This can only be good news for the future of advanced manufacturing here in Wales and for the regional and wider Welsh economy.”

The Economy Secretary also thanked the Deeside Enterprise Zone for their work in driving through the new facility which is key to the Board's strategic plan for the area.

Professor Keith Ridgway, Executive Dean of the AMRC, said:

“We share the Welsh Government's bold ambition to enhance North

Wales' reputation for manufacturing excellence, creating secure, high-value jobs and wealth for the whole of Wales by acting as a magnet for inward investment.

"The new facility will bring the research and innovation talents and experience of the University of Sheffield AMRC to a new venture in a region rich in manufacturing history and opportunity.

"Our goal is to make the facility an open access research hub that will drive significant improvements in productivity, performance and quality not just in the aerospace sector but across the broader advanced manufacturing sector in North Wales, including nuclear, automotive, energy and food and drink.

"Airbus is a longstanding partner of the AMRC in a key sector of the economy. By building on the research relationships we have with we will ensure the company remains at the forefront of aerospace development, supporting skills in the area and upskilling its manufacturing supply chain partners.

"We will also be working closely with other universities in Wales to maximise our impact, drawing on their research expertise to develop new projects that benefit the Welsh economy and the reputation not just of the University of Sheffield but of universities in Wales, showing how partnerships with industry and government can accelerate big improvements in economic and social wellbeing."

Paul McKinlay, Airbus Senior Vice President and head of Broughton Plant, said:

"Airbus has a longstanding relationship with the AMRC. We have worked in partnership on many ventures and we're delighted our relationship will continue to grow in this latest initiative.

"With their strong skills and expertise in fields such as innovation, advanced manufacturing and digitalisation, they are the perfect organisation to manage Wales' most exciting new facility."

The Welsh Government is working to develop the second phase of the facility on a separate site in North Wales. In July the Welsh Government declared its intention to work with the Deeside Enterprise Zone Board and the Ministry of Defence, led by the Defence Electronics and Components Agency (DECA), on a proposal that would see a second site situated on MOD land adjacent to the Deeside Industrial Park Interchange.

Outcome of Quarantine Unit review published

The Quarantine Unit (QU) scheme was introduced in September 2017, at the request of the Welsh farming industry. It replaced Isolation Facilities as the optional exemption to the six day standstill rule (6DSS) to allow maximum flexibility of movement whilst safeguarding the biosecurity of Welsh farms.

The six day standstill rule was established following the Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak in 2001, and is important in limiting the spread of the disease.

The Cabinet Secretary committed to conducting a review of the QU scheme to address some of the concerns raised by stakeholders and identify any areas for improvement.

The review has identified nine recommendations for improvement – two of which could be implemented before the end of the year, with the remaining seven to be consideration in the New Year.

Before the end of the year, the review recommends improved communications between the Welsh Government and stakeholders through future events and simplified guidance. In addition, it recommends QU guidance in relation to TB to be revisited and where appropriate clarified.

In the New Year, the review makes seven further recommendations for consideration:

- Explore the possibility of amending the 24 hour reporting rule, allowing farmers to report the activation of a QU within 24 hours, whilst the individual animal movements are completed within three days;
- Explore the possibility of developing a grant scheme for QU certification – this will help farmers meet the initial cost of certification;
- Explore group farm certification and renewal inspections by the certification body;
- Assess whether the certification body can combine QU visits with other visits to further reduce costs;
- Allow greater discretion for QU inspectors when considering compliance with requirements (e.g. the use of natural barriers around QU's);
- Ask the certification body to streamline the renewal inspection process for QU's; and
- Continue to collect animal movement data concerning animal movements from Welsh holdings to agricultural shows.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“We introduced the Quarantine Unit scheme, following consultation and close collaboration with the sector, to provide an alternative

for farmers to the six day standstill rule and enable multiple movements to agricultural shows.

“Over the last few months my officials have conducted a review to address some of the issues that have arisen in the first year of the scheme. This has resulted in nine recommendations which I have accepted.

“I hope they go some way to address concerns and I am confident they will help improve the QU system which plays such an important role in minimising the spread of disease. We will continue to review the scheme over the coming years.”

Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop, said:

“Our priority remains keeping diseases out of Wales. Prior to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001, standstill periods did not exist and multiple and long distance movements were responsible for the significant spread of disease.

“The six day standstill remains important in ensuring the biosecurity of this country but QUs provide farmers with flexibility whilst reducing the risk of disease spreading.”

[EU funding helps promote cutting-edge technology in Wales](#)

The £5.8m Centre for Photonics Expertise project will bring together expertise from across Wales and establish collaborative research projects to encourage industries to embrace photonics technology in the use of lasers, sensors and fibre-optics.

Led by Glyndwr University, the three-year project will be delivered in partnership with South Wales, Bangor and Aberystwyth universities, which will work with companies across West and North Wales and the South Wales Valleys in areas such as manufacturing, healthcare, telecommunications, energy and agriculture.

Announcing the funding, Professor Drakeford said:

“It is vital Welsh industry has access to the knowledge and expertise in our highly-acclaimed universities so we can drive innovation and put Wales on a global platform for success.

“This investment highlights the importance of securing replacement funding from the UK Government to support growth and jobs in Wales following our exit from the EU.”

Caroline Gray, director of Wrexham Glyndwr University’s OpTIC Technology Centre, said: “We are delighted to receive this funding and to be leading the project with our partners and other sectors in West Wales and the Valleys.

“The centre will bring together all areas of academic expertise across photonics technology, helping industry develop the next generation of processes and products while boosting business growth and efficiency for the Welsh economy and future generations.”

Photonics is the science of using light to generate energy, detect or transmit information and other forms of radiant energy whose quantum unit is the photon.

High street retailers to get £2,500 cut to their rates bills

The Welsh Government is investing £23.6 million to enhance and extend the high street rates relief scheme in 2019-20.

Around 15,000 businesses, including shops, restaurants, cafes and pubs will receive enhanced support to pay their rates bills from April 2019.

Professor Drakeford said:

“The high street is at the heart of local communities, providing a central hub for people to shop, eat and socialise.

“The current economic conditions and competition from the internet and out-of-town shopping centres, have hit some high street businesses hard.

“This enhanced high street rate relief scheme for 2019-20 will ensure more ratepayers across Wales receive support to pay their bills and can continue to provide much-needed services to their local communities.”

The Welsh Government set up the high street rates relief scheme in April 2017 to provide bespoke support to retailers affected by the 2017 revaluation by

the independent Valuation Office Agency and by the growth in internet sales.

It was extended into 2018-19 to provide further support for high street businesses.

The enhanced scheme for 2019-20 will go further than in previous years providing eligible businesses with up to £2,500 off their non-domestic rates bills.

Some 15,000 retailers throughout Wales with a rateable value of up to £50,000 will benefit from the scheme and rates bills will be reduced to zero for properties with a rateable value of up to £9,100.

Local authorities will also receive an additional £2.4 million to provide discretionary rates relief allowing them to respond to specific local needs. This funding will be provided to councils through the revenue support grant in 2019-20.

Together, an extra £26 million will be made available to help small businesses pay their bills in 2019-20 – this is the full consequential Wales received in the UK Autumn Budget as a result of decisions made in relation to business rates in England.

The enhanced high streets rate relief scheme is in addition to the wide range of support, which the Welsh Government provides to small businesses in Wales.

Every year, it provides more than £210 million to help businesses pay their rates bills and last year the Welsh Government announced a £100 million programme of targeted regeneration investment to support businesses in areas which need it most and a £20 million town centre loans fund to help bring underused, empty or derelict sites in town centres back to life.

Professor Drakeford added:

“This extension to the high street rates relief scheme and the additional funding for discretionary rates relief, together with the permanent small business rates relief scheme, which has been in place since April 2018, combine to offer timely and targeted support for ratepayers across Wales.”

[£2m funding boost to help make Wales a play friendly country](#)

Wales was the first country in the world to legislate for play. Under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, local authorities have a duty to

assess for and then secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas. This aims to ensure every child has a wide range of challenging and interesting opportunities to play and enjoy their leisure time.

The legislation also directs local authorities to consider the diverse needs of all children and young people in their area, including those with disabilities.

The funding, for the 2018-19 financial year, will help local authorities implement the actions identified in their 2018-19 play action plans, and deliver their 2019 play sufficiency assessments.

Projects awarded funding include:

- Small grants to community councils to enable them to provide play provision which meets the needs of the local community;
- Equipment for street play and road closure – high visibility jackets, cones, whistles, balls, etc;
- Inclusive after-school and holiday provision for children with complex needs;
- Pilot projects involving children aged 11-14 years, enabling them to access Welsh medium play provision during school holidays;
- Saturday play sessions for young carers aged 7 to 17;
- The renewal of playgroup surfaces to enable better access for all and the inclusion of sensory rooms in childcare and play settings;
- Outdoor and indoor play equipment for local schools, encouraging them to make the equipment available out of school hours.

Funding will also be available to provide play workers with bespoke training on how to recognise and support children and young people with substance misuse issues, child criminal exploitation, self-harm and suicide, and to support transgender young people.

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“In Wales, we’re proud that we lead the world on ensuring our children have the legal right to play. I am firmly committed to ensuring we continue to improve opportunities for all children and young people to play in safety and, in particular, to support improved access to play for children with disabilities.

“There’s increasing concern about the mental and physical health of children and young people. At the same time, we know playing makes a significant contribution to the fitness and well-being of children and improving perceptions of well-being amongst children and their families.

“I am therefore really pleased to make £2m of funding available to help our local authorities deliver sufficient play opportunities for children and young people in their areas. This will help ensure Wales truly is a play friendly country that meets the needs and rights of all our children.”

The Welsh Government recently hosted the 2018 Four Nations Play Symposium, which provided an opportunity for government ministers, officials, national play organisations and partners from across the four UK nations to share their learning and experiences of strategically providing for children's play.

Huw Irranca-Davies added:

"I'm delighted Wales hosted this year's Symposium. It was a productive and thought-provoking event that will inform our work to continue to make Wales a play friendly country."