

£80m for Glastir and Sustainable Production Grant

The funding package will support the delivery of environmental outcomes including on agriculture pollution and provide support to farmers facing the considerable challenges of Brexit.

Funding of £62.9m will extend all Glastir Advanced agreements, including underlying Glastir Entry elements where they are in place, all current Glastir Commons agreements and all current Glastir Organics contracts to 2021. There will also be a further round of Glastir Small Grants. This will help to ensure ongoing environmental outcomes and a smooth transition to the new Public Goods Scheme.

A further £16m allocation will be made to the Sustainable Production Grant to help farmers prepare for the introduction of regulations to protect water quality from agricultural pollution and improve their nutrient management. The current Farm Business Grant will also continue and will support farmers to invest in equipment and machinery to increase their business sustainability and profitability.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“I am pleased to be able to announce a significant package of support for farmers today through the Rural Development Programme. It will help the industry face the upcoming challenges of Brexit alongside the immediate and ongoing problems associated with agriculture pollution. Importantly as well, the funding will help farmers transition to our new Land Management Programme.

The extension of all Glastir Advanced, Commons and Organics agreements to 2021 will provide certainty for land managers and ensure the ongoing delivery of important environmental outcomes.

Last month I announced I will be introducing all-Wales regulations to help the industry tackle the unacceptable levels of agricultural pollution on our water. I have allocated £16m through the Sustainable Production Grant to support the industry in this work.

As we prepare to leave the EU in just over three months, it is more important than ever that we do all we can to improve the productivity of farm businesses across Wales – the continuation of the Farm business grant will do just that.

We want to see a strong future for farming in Wales after we leave the European Union and are doing all we can, working with the industry, to achieve this. This funding package will maintain the lasting benefits of the current RDP, help farmers adapt and help the agricultural sector thrive in a post-Brexit world.”

Buses and Taxis at the heart of new proposed Welsh Government legislation

Talking directly to passengers and key industry stakeholders – local authorities, bus and taxi companies and passenger groups – the consultation will seek views on proposed changes to the legislation which governs how bus services are planned and delivered, together with reform of the taxi and private hire vehicle licensing regime.

Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Bus services across Wales provide important access to education, training, work, healthcare and simply enjoying a day out. They are a vital link between our communities and an important tool in supporting a vibrant economy.

“Wales’ bus network accounts for about 100 million passenger journeys each year compared with approximately 30 million annual rail journeys. Creation of a fully integrated transport system requires bus provision in Wales to meet the needs of passengers and to be integrated with rail and other transport services.

“Taxis and private hire vehicles also provide a vital public service, connecting people to places when alternative public transport services are not available or viable. The contribution that the sector makes to the night-time and tourism economy in many of our communities cannot be under-estimated and the industry is a vital component in our ambitions for public transport in Wales.

“We have listened to feedback from passengers, local authorities, bus operators, taxi drivers and interest groups about the current provision of public transport and taxi and private hire vehicle services. Everyone agrees change is needed.

“The proposals are aimed at providing better planning and solutions for delivery, putting passengers, local communities and people who currently do not consider public transport as the option to meet their transport needs, at the heart of the decision making.”

The proposed legislative changes are aimed at putting the necessary tools and standards in place to help us realise our ambition.

Ken Skates added:

“I see the integration of our transport network as a key priority –

we need to provide an integrated public transport system in Wales that is safe, reliable, punctual, environmentally-sustainable and accessible to all.”

“On a practical level, we want to bring a uniformity to our public transport and private hire vehicles that will protect passengers, and ensure efficient, clean services.

“Our aim is to increase the number of people using public transport and encourage travellers to switch from private car use, reducing pollution and congestion. We want to see more people using public transport to get them where they need and want to be efficiently and on time.”

Welsh exports up by £500 million

The latest export statistics – published this week – show that the value of Welsh exports stood at £16.9 billion in the year to September 2018, compared to £16.4bn the previous year.

Of those Welsh exports 60.9% went to EU countries. This is 11 percentage points higher than the UK share which stands at 49.9%.

The figures also show that Welsh exports to the EU countries increased by £452m, an increase of 4.6% on the previous 12 months. Meanwhile exports to non-EU countries went up by £45m (0.7%).

Germany continued to be the top export destination for Welsh goods with 18.8% of total exports finding their way there, while 50.6% of Welsh exports fell into the category of Machinery and Transport Equipment.

Economy Secretary, Ken Skates said:

“These latest statistics show another significant hike in the level of Welsh exports and I would like to congratulate businesses across Wales who have helped to deliver this impressive success. The figures are the result of a lot of hard work and determination by our businesses in what are undoubtedly challenging and uncertain economic times.

Our Economic Action Plan, which I launched a year ago now, prioritises exports and trade, and puts a focus on helping businesses retain their existing trading partners while supporting them to branch out into other global markets and we will continue to work closely and proactively with the business community to support this.

Once again these statistics highlight the economic importance of our excellent trading relationships with EU countries, which currently account for 60.9% of our total exports. We have been clear that the UK Government's proposal for the future relationship with EU falls far short of providing the stability and certainty needed for the long term.

We will keep calling on the UK Government to deliver a Brexit that embraces the future relationship with the EU set out in Securing Wales' Future, ensures Wales enjoys full and unfettered access to the Single Market and retains the ability to participate in a customs union. This will enable us to maintain and build on the significant successes our exports businesses which in turn will help to drive the growth of our economy."

Welsh Government announces North Wales Growth Deal commitment

The Welsh Government's investment in the Growth Deal will be in addition to its existing commitments in North Wales.

The UK Government announced it will contribute £120m to the North Wales Growth Deal in the UK Autumn Budget in October. But the Welsh Government will urge the UK Government to go further and meet the deal's original aspirations

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy said:

"I'm pleased to announce today that the Welsh Government will match the UK Government's contribution to the North Wales Growth Deal.

"We are fully committed to delivering a transformative growth deal and are working with partners to get the package and direction right for North Wales.

"We will continue to work to ensure our funding contribution and the UK Government's meets the aspirations of the deal. We believe we need to keep pressing the UK Government to provide what the ambition board had been expecting and should its contribution increase, we will match it."

The Welsh Government's contribution to the deal is above and beyond existing investments and commitments in North Wales.

In the Cabinet Secretary's portfolio alone, these include more than £600m in transport infrastructure improvements, including the £135m Caernarfon to Bontnewydd bypass and improvements to the A55 and A494. Plans for the third Menai crossing continue to progress, with the recent announcement of the preferred route.

Other investments include £20m in the Menai Science Park, which is the first of its kind in Wales and the £20m for the Advanced Manufacturing Research Institute, in Broughton, which will help attract businesses to North Wales and improve skills.

Mr Skates added:

“With our existing investments, together with today's announcement, we are investing hundreds of millions of pounds in North Wales demonstrating that the continued improvement to the infrastructure and economy of the region is our priority.

“We all need to work together, the UK Government, Welsh Government, local authorities and private sector partners to make the best possible success of the deal.”

[First Minister delivers Seasons Greetings to winner of Christmas card competition](#)

Nearly 800 entries were received for this year's competition, from Year 3 and 4 pupils across Wales and for the first time since launching the competition, entries were received from Ysgol y Gaiman in Patagonia.

The winning entry was drawn by 8 year old Ellis Hughes a pupil from Ysgol Gynradd Llanfair-ym-Muallt. The hand-drawn card shows a large Welsh dragon surrounded by falling snow, a snowman and Father Christmas flying above.

The winning entry will now be used as the official Christmas card which will be sent to dignitaries across the world including Her Majesty the Queen and the Prime Minister

The First Minister said:

“I was thoroughly impressed with the hundreds of entries received from all around the country and especially surprised to receive ones from as far as Argentina. The decision was an extremely hard

one to make, particularly as this will be my last and all the entries were of high quality Ellis' design particularly stood out for me as it features Father Christmas soaring through the sky above Wales's famous Welsh dragon during snowfall.

"I would like to thank all those who entered this year's competition and wish them all a very Merry Christmas."

Llanfair-ym-Muallt Primary Head Teacher, Mr Gareth Cornelius said:

"The pupils really enjoyed taking part in the Christmas card competition, it was a great honour to hear Ellis had won and welcome the First Minister here to present a framed version of his card."