

Education Secretary praises Newport school's role in developing Wales' digital curriculum

Changes to the curriculum mean digital skills will now be developed and taught through all parts of a pupil's schooling and not just isolated to specific ICT or computer science classes.

The Welsh Government's Digital Competence Framework is now available to all schools and follows two independent reviews that recommended changes.

The new approach means more than just using computers and aims to equip pupils with the digital skills they need and can apply in the real world in the years to come.

St Julian's is a Digital Pioneer School which worked to develop the Digital Competence Framework.

Visiting the school, Kirsty Williams said:

"Pioneer Schools such as St Julian's are essential to the success of the Digital Competence Framework and the wider new curriculum and I want to thank everyone for their hard work."

"This radical new approach is about embedding digital skills and knowledge in everything our pupils do as they progress through school. No longer will such issues be isolated in weekly computer classes; instead these vital skills will be applied across our curriculum. They're now as crucial to our pupils' development as learning to read and write. This is a key part of our move to create a curriculum fit for now and the future and not the late 20th century."

Luke Mansfield, Deputy Head-teacher, St Julians Primary, said:

"The entire purpose of the Digital Competence Framework is to equip our learners in Wales with the necessary skills and understanding they will need not only to thrive but to survive in the increasingly digital world in which they are growing up. Being able to effectively use technology to communicate, collaborate, produce and handle data are important life skills and will significantly increase employment opportunities for our young people but more importantly, it is crucial for pupils to have a good understanding of the potential risks involved with using technology and the effects that it can have on their health. The entire first strand of the DCF aims to help children understand the importance of

limiting screen time, knowing how to protect themselves from cyberbullying or identity theft, being able to evaluate the reliability of online information.”

“With our pupils being immersed in this digital world at such a young age and technology developing at such a rapid rate, all of these skills are vital and schools, parents and the media must work together to educate pupils and raise awareness of these issues.”

The Education Secretary also visited Lliswerry High School to see how the school is helping an ethnically diverse range of pupils. Lliswerry has welcomed learners from Eastern Europe and with Welsh Government funding has employed a Roma Heritage Link person, to help develop a strong relationship with the Roma community.

[Council tax payers in Wales continue to pay less than England](#)

The Welsh Government release shows that average Band D council tax for Wales in 2017-18 stands at £1,420, £171 less than the average Band D in England, which stands at £1,591.

The average band D council tax rise in Wales is also lower than the figure for England based on estimates published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The average increase in England in 2017-18 is 4.0% and the increase in Wales is 3.3%.

Through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS), the Welsh Government has also maintained its support to almost 300,000 households who need assistance in meeting their council tax bills. Of these approximately 220,000 pay no council tax at all.

Welcoming today’s figures, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government Mark Drakeford said:

“Councils here are facing some real financial challenges but these latest figures show we are protecting local government from the worst of the cuts handed down by Westminster and, in doing so, protecting the taxpayer; a situation that has not been replicated on the other side of the border.

“In 2017-18, we are increasing funding for local government by £10 million compared to 2016-17. Under the funding floor we introduced in the Local Government Settlement, no council will have to manage

on less than 99.5% of the cash provided to them last year, and most will have more.

“While our Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) is playing a key role in tackling poverty in Wales we’re currently looking at how we can make the system fairer for those who less able to contribute. We’ll make a further announcement on our plans during the course of this Assembly term.”

Independent recommendations will have positive impact on the IPFR process says Vaughan Gething

The NHS Wales IPFR process is the mechanism used by all health boards in Wales to make decisions on access to treatments that are not routinely available for individual patients.

The review was established in July 2016 with a particular focus on considering the “clinical exceptionality” decision making criteria for IPFR and the scope to reduce the number of IPFR panels in Wales. Central to the review was the patient perspective.

The review’s comprehensive findings were published in January and are available here.

Ahead of his Oral Statement in the Senedd this afternoon, Vaughan Gething said:

“My approach to this review has been to be open, inclusive and transparent from the outset involving all political parties, the public and the NHS in Wales.

“I’m pleased that the consensus is that this is a helpful piece of work that makes thoughtful and pragmatic recommendations that will help health boards deal with what are sensitive and very often complex decisions. I am particularly pleased that the patient voice has centre stage in the report.

“The good news from the report is that many aspects of the system are working well and the review group have made helpful recommendations to strengthen those and improve upon other aspects of the process.

“The review concluded that the principle for making decisions at an

individual patient level about access to a treatment should be based upon the level of expected clinical benefit and whether the treatment offers reasonable value for money.

“With regards to reducing the number of IPFR panels, the review group have recommended it would not be the best way forward.

“The review has suggested improvements to the overall process to support health boards make these highly complex and sensitive decisions. This includes clarifying when it is appropriate to use the IPFR process, and strengthening quality assurance.

“I would like to thank the review group, once again, for their hard work and commitment in completing this complex piece of work. I would also like to express my gratitude to all of the patients who have been involved in the review process. The evidence they’ve provided in the workshops that have taken place across Wales has been invaluable.

“I have written to all of the health boards to confirm the implementation of the recommendations by September.

“I believe the recommendations in this report, when implemented, will have a positive impact on the IPFR process. It will make the system more easily understandable and less prone to being misused. Something I’m sure the people of Wales will welcome.”

[Communities Secretary launches consultation on park home commission fees](#)

The consultation follows a review of the sector commissioned by the Welsh Government. While the review made several recommendations to improve standards in the sector, barely a quarter of park home operators contributed detailed financial information to the review.

Announcing the consultation, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“The review into the industry rightly highlights that commission rates are a complex issue with the potential for significant consequences. I have therefore been considering the matter very carefully before deciding to hold a public consultation.

“I have concluded that we should examine further the level of the

commission charged by site owners, but, in light of the very strong representations I have received I am currently of the view that there may be a case to reduce or even abolish the commission, though I will of course want to take full account of consultation responses before coming to a final view.

“The options I will consider will include reducing or even abolishing the commission rate, as well, of course, as retaining the status quo. I would therefore like to invite the park home owners to let me have the evidence which they believe would justify the latter option, but I sincerely hope all interested parties will take advantage of the opportunity this consultation will provide to submit further information and scrutinise the available evidence.”

Informal engagement will begin immediately and the formal consultation will be published as soon as possible.

[Welsh innovation receives global recognition for helping to save and improve lives](#)

Backed by over £3m Welsh Government funding and run in collaboration with Innovate UK, the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) has gained interest from other UK devolved nations as well as attracting attention from Ireland, Sweden and Australia.

Launched in Wales in 2013, the SBRI offers businesses – many of which are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) – the opportunity to bid for research and development (R&D) funding to develop technology-driven solutions for specific challenges facing the public sector.

Run as competitions each challenge focusses on an area of public service where solutions either do not yet exist or where partial solutions might be improved.

Areas where solutions are already being progressed include the improvement of health and patient care, medical treatments, road safety, renewable energy generation and environmental management.

To date, 14 SBRI competitions have been run in Wales, resulting in 66 contracts valued at approximately £5m being awarded to companies to develop Welsh public sector solutions: 44 contracts at Phase 1 (developing the proposal) and 22 contracts at Phase 2 (creating a prototype with a view to bringing it to market).

One of the first SBRI challenges run in Wales was by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (UHB) which wanted to develop a solution to improve patient care by helping nurses and carers reduce administration duties so they could spend more time with patients.

The target of this challenge was for nurses to spend 10% more time with patients. After two years of practical collaboration between the UHB's nurses and a small Bangor start up company, Elidir Health, a software solution has been developed which promises to increase nurses' time with patients not just by 10% but potentially up to 23%. Indeed this challenge has been so successful that Elidir Health is now working with Cwm Taf UHB as well as Betsi Cadwaladr UHB to explore how this software can be adopted across both health boards' pediatric units.

The Welsh Government's own Transport department has also made use of SBRI challenges to develop solutions to identified issues, for example improving road safety and reducing the number of motorcyclists killed or seriously injured on Welsh roads.

Of the bids submitted to this challenge two projects were selected, with the first example already complete.

Armourgel Ltd has developed a motorcycle helmet liner that will significantly reduce the impact to a rider's head during a collision. This can make the difference between a serious brain injury and a minor one.

The second project has developed a junction alert system which will soon be trialed on Welsh roads. The project will be able to test the system in peak motorcycling season and by September the company will have fully tested the system in all weather conditions and will report on its market potential.

Skills and Science Minister, Julie James is keen to point out that both these projects have the potential to save the lives of motorcyclists not just on Welsh roads but across the world, saying:

"The Small Business Research Initiative is a great example of how the public and private sector can work together to tackle societal challenges in innovative ways and deliver benefits to both public sector bodies and industry as well as the people they serve.

"My aim now is for our SBRI programme to become a mainstream tool in the Welsh public sector, promoting innovation and driving forward our technological potential.

"SBRI can open up huge opportunities for Welsh businesses and help solve some of the toughest challenges we will all face in the future and we plan to use it."