

Economy Minister in Geneva for Brexit Talks with Automotive Sector

The Minister also took an early look at the all electric Lagonda All Terrain Concept, which is being formally launched at the show, and will be the first production Battery Electric Vehicle to be manufactured at Aston Martin's new facility in St Athan, with production starting in 2022.

Speaking from Geneva, Ken Skates said:

"The Welsh Automotive sector is a vital part of our economy, employing nearly 19,000 people in Wales. It is also vital to the UK supply chain, with more than a hundred supply chain companies and two engine plants producing over 30% of the 2.7m engines produced in the UK.

"We know the automotive industry is experiencing a period of rapid change caused by major technological change and stronger environmental standards. Add to that the potential for new tariff and non-tariff barriers and frictions and costs if the UK leaves the EU without access to the Single European Market and there is no doubt that this an uncertain and challenging time for the sector.

"We have been working with companies in the sector on a daily basis, assisting them in a number of operational and strategic areas including investment plans, training needs, competitiveness issues and export market requirements for example.

"In what looks like being a crucial week for Brexit, this visit has provided another excellent opportunity for me to speak to the sector directly and hear about their current challenges and uncertainties.

"We know that our sector-focused Brexit awareness and workshop sessions, our Business Wales Brexit portal and the Brexit Resilience Fund are all being well received by the sector and are helping companies to prepare as best as they can for a future that is largely unknown. As a business friendly Government, it is vital that we listen and that our support continues to evolve and respond to need.

"We will continue to push the UK Government to agree a deal that gives our automotive manufacturing companies the best possible chance to continue to compete in this global industry that is so vital to the UK and the Welsh economy.

"I was especially pleased to see the fantastic all-electric Lagonda concept, which will be produced at St Athan. Our relationship with Aston Martin is a compelling example of what our business friendly

approach can achieve and we will continue to work constructively and proactively with the sector in the challenging months and years ahead.”

Minister at Jones Bros to celebrate Apprenticeship Week

The visit is part of Apprenticeship Week 2019 – a week long celebration of the positive impact apprenticeships have on individuals and businesses.

The Welsh Government supports a wide range of individuals, businesses and sectors through its Apprenticeship Scheme and is committed to creating 100,000 apprenticeship opportunities over the life of the current Assembly term.

Speaking after the visit, Economy Minister Ken Skates said:

“It was a pleasure to visit Jones Bros, a family founded and run civil engineering company that employs around 350 people here in Ruthin, and is behind some of our flagship North Wales infrastructure schemes including the Llangefni Link Road.

In the last five years, Jones Bros has recruited and trained an average of 34 apprentices per year, with each employed by the company from day one and benefiting from the high-quality training provided at its dedicated training facility.

Securing and retaining a skilled workforce will be crucial for future economic success beyond Brexit. The quality of people in a business has been proved time and again by research to be the difference between success and failure, so raising workforce skills is an investment in the future.

Apprenticeships can provide the perfect avenue into work and allow companies to find, nurture and develop staff. They also help ensure our economy is supported by a workforce that is equipped to tackle the challenges of today and ready for the opportunities of tomorrow – and as we work to prepare for a life outside of the EU this is more important than ever.

The Welsh Government is determined to see Wales lead the way. Two years into our ambitious commitment to deliver 100,000 apprenticeships here in Wales by 2021, we are already seeing apprenticeships across all sectors make a significant contribution

to our economy. And it's an economy and a workforce that's growing.

The last few months have seen record levels of employment in Wales, with economic inactivity at a record low. This is testament to our ongoing work to drive prosperity and increase resilience within our economy, with apprenticeships an important part of this mix."

Richard Owen, training manager at Jones Bros Civil Engineering UK, said:

"Jones Bros is an industry leader for apprenticeships, and the feedback we have from those taking part is incredible.

Our apprenticeship programmes not only train the learners how to carry out their work, but they give them life skills and a very solid foundation for their career progression.

The vast majority of our apprentices have stayed with the company after completing their apprenticeship, with some now enrolled on our higher apprenticeship course as part of their career development.

We were pleased to have the chance to showcase how our apprentices have, and will continue to, impact the Welsh economy by working and developing new skills on significant projects in the region such as the Caernarfon and Bontnewydd Bypass."

Innovation key for very rural broadband – Deputy Minister

Due to the complexity of reaching some areas, fibre rollout will not be suitable for all the remaining premises. Other solutions include communities coming together with the assistance of the Welsh Government's Access Broadband Cymru vouchers and the use of different and innovative technologies.

The Deputy Minister visited a scheme in Llanddewi Rhydderch, near Abergavenny, which is delivering faster broadband to residents as well as showcasing its potential for other areas. It uses TV white space, which is the unused TV channels available following the switch to digital.

TV white space also has the potential of connecting the "internet of things", making a connected home or work space a reality by offering a broadband signal capable of handling multiple devices.

The scheme, managed by Monmouthshire Council, has benefited from the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

The Deputy Minister also visited Michaelston y Fedw which now has access to some of the fastest broadband speeds in the UK. They achieved this by pulling together and taking advantage of the Welsh Government's broadband voucher schemes to build their own network.

The project, thought to be the first of its kind in Wales, also came top in the European Broadband Awards in 2018.

Lee Waters said:

“We have come a long way in Wales, with over 95 per cent of premises now able to access superfast broadband, compared with under 50 per cent when we began Superfast Cymru. This progress is largely as a result of our intervention as private companies had no plans to rollout the infrastructure in large parts of Wales.

“Despite this progress we want to reach the remaining five per cent. Many of these will be in very rural areas and while we are investing over £22m in a further fibre rollout it will not be possible to reach all of these through this technology alone. We need to look at innovative solutions, as part of a package of measures, which includes fibre, to make a difference in all communities.

“Different technology such as TV white space and other emerging wireless developments will have a greater role in the mix of delivering faster speeds to those in very rural areas, and the scheme near Abergavenny shows what can be achieved.

“The community of Michaelston y Fedw have also shown how community effort backed by our voucher schemes can make a real difference, with speeds of 900Mbps now enjoyed there.

“There is no one size fits all solution to reach the remaining premises, and in the absence of a planned commercial rollout, we are using and assessing a variety of ways to reach very rural areas.”

The Welsh Government is already investing £22.5m to reach 26,000 of the remaining premises through fibre broadband, as part of a suite of measures. This is in addition to the £200m invested in the Superfast Cymru scheme which has connected more than 733,000 premises in areas where commercial companies had no plans to go.

New Chair to the Board of Community Health Councils announced

There are seven CHCs in Wales. They are independent bodies that represent the interests of people in the health service in their area.

CHCs act as the public voice in letting managers of health services know what people want and how things can be improved.

The Board of CHCs represents the voice of patients and the public at a national level. It sets out the national standards CHCs must meet, provides advice, guidance and support and is also responsible for monitoring and managing their performance.

This is an exciting yet challenging time for the Board and the current CHC model during its transition to the new Citizen Voice body. The role of the Chair provides an all Wales strategic leadership opportunity which will require the Chair to lead the Board of CHCs and the wider CHC movement through the period of transition.

Mr Pearce has a strong background in public services in particular local government, as a Director of Education and later as a Corporate Director.

He was a member of Aneurin Bevan Community Health Council from 2010 to 2018, serving the last three years as Chair. During this time he was engaged within the health sector on a number of different committees, working groups and research projects.

Mr Pearce said

“Community Health Councils have fulfilled a vital role for patients and communities to ensure their individual and collective voices are heard and make a difference.

“It is crucial that Wales continues to have an independent organisation that fulfils such a role so that the voice of patients and communities are central to ensuring health services meet the current and future expectations of the Nation. I am looking forward to leading CHCs through a challenging period of transition to the setting up of the new Citizen Voice body and with it, the closer integration of health and social care.”

Vaughan Gething said:

“I congratulate John on his appointment, I’m sure he’ll make a

significant contribution to Community Health Councils and I wish him every success in his new role.”

£2m funding announced to improve the lives of people with a learning disability in Wales

This new investment is part of Learning Disability: Improving Lives Programme, which aims to improve the way services are delivered to people with a learning disability in Wales. The programme of work covers housing, health, education, transport and social care services.

The £2m announced today will be used to achieve improvements related to the health actions in the programme, over the next three years, including:

- reduce the inappropriate use of medication and restraint through increasing the use of a range of evidence based interventions such as positive behavioural support
- improve the take up and quality of annual health checks offered by GPs to people with a learning disability
- improve the capability and capacity of acute hospital care to make reasonable adjustments enabling people with a learning disability to access mainstream services
- to ensure that people with complex needs have timely and easy access to learning disability specialist services including trauma/crisis, the full range of accommodation including secure provision and out of hours access
- implement the specialist and mainstream school nursing framework – a set of evidence based standards for nursing in schools.

Minister for Health and Social Services, Vaughan Gething, said:

“In our ‘Prosperity for All’ strategy we have committed to improving the overall health and well-being of all individuals in Wales.

“This new investment will support improvements in health services for people with a learning disability to reduce health inequalities and to help improve people’s health and quality of life.”