

PaCE helps 1000th parent into employment

“I can’t thank the programme enough, it has given me the confidence needed to reach my goals”, Firefighter, Adele.

“I can finally provide my children with a life they deserve”, Morgan, mum of two.

“I couldn’t be prouder of what I’ve done for my daughter and I”, Chanelle, self-employed painter.

These are the comments of some of the 1000 parents who have been helped back to work by the Parents, Childcare and Employment programme (PaCE).

Supported by the European Social Fund and operated in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, the scheme plays a key part in the Welsh Government’s Employability Plan and aims to provide support for economically inactive parents to overcome childcare barriers, enabling them to prepare for and access employment opportunities.

The scheme has helped parents like Adele, a young mum with a small baby. She wanted to do something to make a difference and enrolled onto a fire safety course where she was introduced to the PaCE Programme. Her advisor helped her gain the qualifications needed to become a firefighter. She now works for the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

Morgan is another lone parent helped by PaCE. After a spell of unemployment she sought help from a PaCE advisor who helped her secure childcare for her two children and training to get back into the workplace. She also received practical advice on interview techniques and drafting a CV. As a result, she found work within two miles of her home which enabled her to maintain a work-life balance. She eventually gained a promotion, and her employer, Al-Met, is allowing her one day release a week to complete a fully funded Level 3 Diploma in Accounting.

Chanelle was an unemployed single parent who previously worked as a delivery driver. She needed a job with more flexibility and wanted to set up her own painting and decorating business. The PaCE programme helped her to achieve this by providing support to get on to a college course, win a start-up grant and obtain advice on how to get a loan for a company vehicle. She now runs The Lady Paint and Decor Co. which won gold in the Crown New Entrant painting competition last year.

The Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning said,

“This is a great achievement and I thank everyone for their hard

work in supporting these 1000 parents back into work. Our Employability Plan outlines our commitment to removing the barriers which prevent people from working and ensuring individuals are trained, educated and prepared for the world of work.

“Adele, Morgan and Chanelle are examples of the PaCE scheme successfully delivering on that commitment through helping parents seek affordable childcare, find appropriate training opportunities and secure jobs with flexible working hours to help them into sustainable employment. I’m pleased to see this scheme is having such an impact and enabling parents to access work so that they too can contribute to our society.”

PaCE advisors have been working closely with the Childcare Offer for Wales to ensure parents can secure childcare once they are in sustainable employment. The Childcare Offer is currently being tested in a number of local authorities and will be made available to all eligible parents from September 2020.

Over £260,000 to support ten more Business Improvement Districts

Once the BID is agreed via a legal ballot, each business contributes financially via a levy, which is then used to fund the agreed activities set out in their business plan. These could include marketing, promotion and events, car parking, tackling anti-social behaviour, improving access to towns, or work to make the area more vibrant and viable.

The towns receiving funding as part of the current programme are:

- Brecon
- Llangollen
- Newtown
- Barry
- Port Talbot
- Treorchy
- Aberdare
- Mold

Funding is also being provided to Newport for an ICT and digital-focused BID and to Ebbw Vale for a BID focused on industry linked to the Enterprise Zone. Sector BIDs across the UK are increasing in number, and Welsh Government is keen to ensure they are encouraged in Wales.

Rebecca Evans said:

“We are seeing BIDs make a real difference to town centres across Wales, but setting them up takes time, effort and support, which is why we provide Welsh Government funding to get them off the ground.

“We are committed to creating lasting economic change in the South Wales Valleys through our Valleys Taskforce, and I hope the BID proposals in Aberdare, Treorchy, Port Talbot and Ebbw Vale, will play a significant role in this.

“BIDs can help to revitalise our town centres and promote regeneration. We have seen existing BIDs delivering increased street cleaning initiatives, tackling antisocial behaviour, reducing crime, offering bespoke business training courses and hosting numerous events and festivals.”

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Collectively, the eight BIDs created in the last programme have generated over £5m private investment to support their chosen activities. This is a significant return on our investment, helping drive local economic development and supporting our Welsh high streets.

“I am particularly pleased to see two innovative proposals come forward. The proposal from Ebbw Vale aligns with the broader work of the Enterprise Zone in that area and complements other initiatives, including the £100m Tech Valleys Initiative.

“In Newport I am keen to see how a BID focused on the ICT and digital sectors can help support our more regionally focussed approach to economic development.”

Education Secretary thanks Student Loans Company staff for implementing new package of support for Welsh students

For the first time this academic year, all eligible Welsh undergraduate students starting university this year are able to apply for a new financial support package that will help address living costs. The first of its kind in the UK, it will support students when they most need it, recognising that

costs such as accommodation are the main barrier for those making the choice about whether to go to university. As a result, SFW staff have managed a successful transition to the new package as a new cohort of students apply for funding and begin their courses.

Addressing the staff, Kirsty Williams said:

“As you know, we are delivering a set of important reforms for all Welsh undergraduate and postgraduate students. The new package is the most generous anywhere in the UK and will ensure that the opportunity to go to university is based on academic ability and not someone’s social background.

“This has meant many changes for you this year and I appreciate your hard work in helping us to develop and implement the reforms.

“I am also delighted that, like all public sector workers and external suppliers working in Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government, SLC’s staff in Llandudno Junction are paid the real living wage. Universities across Wales have also committed to become real living wage employers, so we will be a higher education sector that is truly a real living wage sector. This is unique in the UK, and something of which we can all be proud.”

During the visit the Cabinet Secretary met with the Student Loans Company’s new CEO Paula Sussex and also listened in to staff taking calls from customers to get a flavour of their work.

SLC’s Chief Executive Paula Sussex said:

“I was delighted to welcome the Cabinet Secretary to our offices in Llandudno Junction to meet our staff and to see for herself the tremendous work they do in administering student finance on behalf of the Welsh Government.

So far in this academic year SLC has processed around 70,000 applications for funding from new and returning students from Wales”

[Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales determines an increase in](#)

councillors' allowances this year

The financial constraint on the public sector and particularly local authorities has meant that the link with average Welsh earnings has not been maintained. The Panel considers that this has undervalued the worth of elected members. To avoid further erosion in relation to average earnings the Panel has decided to increase the basic annual salary to £13,868 (an increase of 1.97%).

The salaries of leaders and members of the executive have not been increased for several years. The Panel consider that holders of these posts have significant functional responsibility. The Panel have therefore proposed a modest increase of £800 (inclusive of the £268 increase in the basic salary).

The Panel has mandated payment of a contribution to costs and expenses for all members of community and town councils. Previously this was not mandated for all groups of community councils, but feedback expressed disappointment in this decision, the Panel felt that any member who wanted to receive this payment should be entitled to do so.

Standards in Welsh social housing continue to rise

As of the end of March 2018, 91% of homes managed by local authorities and housing associations in Wales were compliant with Welsh Housing Quality Standards, an increase of five percentage points compared to a year earlier.

The Welsh Housing Quality Standards measure 42 elements across seven categories:

- In a good state of repair
- Safe and secure
- Adequately heated, fuel efficient and well insulated
- Contain up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms
- Well managed (for rented housing)
- Located in attractive and safe environments
- As far as possible suit the specific requirements of the household (e.g. specific disabilities).

Rebecca Evans said:

“Every year we invest £108m to support local authorities and

housing associations to improve the quality of our social housing stock in Wales and to meet the target of full compliance with the WHQS target by 2020. I am clear that there is more to do, but these figures show our investment is paying off.

“Good quality housing is a Welsh Government priority because it is crucial to our health and wellbeing. Public Health Wales’ work tells us that poor housing costs the NHS £67m a year, so this investment is an investment in people’s health, an investment to tackle fuel poverty and an investment to improve people’s lives.

“I am pleased to see good progress against this target and I expect to see local authorities and housing associations work to meet this target by 2020.”