

Swansea-based Centre of Excellence welcomed with £6.5m investment

Swansea University led a consortium bringing together universities and industry and won the UK wide contest to establish a Centre of Excellence. The university will establish an Active Buildings Centre, leading on work to bring buildings that can generate and store their own energy – active buildings – to wider use.

Housing and Regeneration Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“We are committed to developing affordable and energy efficient housing, as we work to achieve stretching climate change targets and meet our target to build 20,000 affordable homes this Assembly term.

“Swansea University’s success is a recognition of their work in this area through the SPECIFIC Innovation and Knowledge Centre and the energy and expertise in the housebuilding sector in Wales. It also reflects our commitment to supporting the development of buildings that can reduce energy bills and generate electricity.

“We are dedicating £5m of our Innovative Housing Programme over two years to support eligible projects developed at the Active Building Centre. We are looking for projects that can help meet our affordable housing needs, projects that can tackle fuel poverty and improve the lives of people who live in them.

“I’m delighted to offer this support to the exciting new Active Building Centre being developed at Swansea University.”

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“I am pleased to have provided £1.5m to support the Active Building Centre which will further the ambitions of our Economic Action Plan by driving inclusive growth, reducing carbon emissions and helping to attract more research and innovation funding to Wales.

“We are currently exploring how we grow a supply chain to deliver new innovative building products, services and help transform the construction sector. We are working closely with the university to find a suitable site to develop this work further.

“Innovations in housebuilding have the potential to create new skills and new jobs and enable us to become a leader in this field. I’m looking forward to watching this project flourish and grow.”

£51m to support the growth in Welsh medium education

The grant will support some 41 projects across 16 local authorities and create an additional 2818 school and childcare places for Welsh medium learners. This is in addition to the £5 million for the Pantycelyn development announced earlier this year, making a total of £ 51 million to support Welsh education.

The Minister made the announcement today during a visit to Ysgol Gyfyn Gwynllyw in Pontypool which will be receiving a new primary school and nursery on the site as a result of the Welsh Medium Capital Grant.

Also among the 41 projects that will now be funded through the grant are new Welsh medium primaries in Merthyr Tydfil and Torfaen, the first ever Welsh medium school in Monmouth town, and an innovative Welsh language centre in Denbighshire.

Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan said:

“These projects will make a significant contribution to the provision of Welsh medium education. Having a comfortable, modern, fit-for-purpose environment in which to learn is vital to ensuring young people have the best possible education. This extra funding will mean that even more of our students will be able to benefit from excellent facilities to learn through the medium of Welsh.

“In addition to creating new schools and expanding current sites, this extra funding will give the green light to Welsh language centres across Wales. These centres make learning Welsh as a second language much more accessible and that’s vital if the language is to continue to grow and thrive.

“Our challenge of reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050 is a significant challenge and education is key to our success. By investing in new Welsh medium schools and improving and increasing the teaching of Welsh in English medium schools we are paving the way for the future and laying the right foundations to reach this target.”

Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Providing early opportunities for Welsh learning is vital if we are to increase the number of Welsh speakers, and

I'm pleased today's funding announcement will also go towards increasing the number of childcare places for Welsh medium learners.

"By working together across government and combining funding from both the Welsh Medium Capital and Childcare Offer Capital Grants we have been able to get better return on investment, resulting in better services for young people."

Appointment of chair of the Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee

Martin has a background in planning, transport and regeneration, as well as flood risk management. He brings many years of experience managing multidisciplinary teams and has worked on and chaired a number of Boards and committees.

The Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee was established under the provision of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The purpose of the Committee is to advise Welsh Ministers on all flood and coastal erosion risk management matters in Wales, including raising awareness, preparation and community resilience to flooding.

Hannah Blythyn said:

"I am very pleased Martin Buckle has agreed to chair the Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee. His experience, knowledge and expertise will help us deliver our immediate and longer term national priorities set out in the forthcoming National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Risk."

The chair of the Committee is paid £225 per day with a time commitment of up to 36 days per annum, with an initial tenure of three years. Martin Buckle does not hold any other Ministerial appointment.

All appointments are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process. However, in accordance with the original Nolan recommendations, there is a requirement for the political activity of appointees (if any declared) to be published. Martin Buckle has not carried out any political activities in the last five years.

NHS staff to benefit from new pay deal

Trade unions have unanimously agreed to the deal, offered by the Welsh Government, which includes a range of pay and non-pay proposals that will benefit staff and patients. It matches, and in some areas goes beyond the pay deal for England.

As part of the deal pay bands will be restructured to include higher starting pay, removal of overlapping pay points and shorter pay scales.

It guarantees fair basic pay awards for the next three years to staff who are at the top of their bands – in cumulative 6.5% in three years.

The Health Secretary said:

“Our NHS staff do a fantastic job delivering world-class care under immense pressure and scrutiny. They work incredibly hard, always putting patients first and keeping them safe, while delivering the best care possible.

“I’m pleased that today we are able to reward this dedication with a new pay deal that gives parity with their counterparts in England, and goes beyond it in some areas that will benefit the Welsh NHS.

“After 8 years of austerity, imposed by the UK Government, we have committed extra funding beyond the consequential funding that we received following the pay rise in England, to offer a deal which is not only fair to staff and taxpayers but will also lead to a better NHS for Wales.”

The agreement includes a continuing commitment to look at the annual Living Wage Foundation recommendations so that NHS pay scales remain fair in the future.

It also provides better payments during sickness absence than in England, as part of a commitment to improve the health, wellbeing and attendance of NHS staff in Wales. Trade unions and employers will also work together to support individuals if they face a diagnosis of a terminal illness, including support for the TUC “Dying to Work” campaign.

The Health Secretary has said work will begin to make sure staff see the benefits in their pay packets before Christmas.

A range of supporting resources on the deal, such as FAQs and a Pay Journey Calculator are available on the NHS Wales Employers website:

[Town centres central to Valleys vision](#)

Alun Davies is Chair of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys, which was established to deliver lasting change for people living and working in the valleys.

On the visit yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary met with members of the community to discuss the work of the Taskforce and the role it can play in ensuring our high streets continue to thrive.

The Cabinet Secretary said,

“Town centres and high streets play a central role in creating a sense of community and providing us with a place to shop, do business, socialise and live. Our high streets should be the heart of our towns, offering a vibrant local economy and bustling community and we all have a role to play in ensuring they remain sustainable.

“Since I set up the Taskforce, many people have pointed out one of the main challenges facing Valleys communities is the decline of the traditional high street. This is not just as a threat to independent retailers, but changing shopping habits, in particular increasing online and out-of-town purchases, combined with falling disposable incomes, can cause difficulties too.

“People tell me they want to shop on their high street, and support local business, but when it’s cheaper, and more convenient to do so online, or even out-of-town, it’s a difficult choice to make.

“While we know that our town centres are resilient and are used to adapting to market forces, the Valleys Taskforce has been working with our community partners to find solutions to some of these issues so that our high streets are not only able to survive, but to thrive.

“Recently, the Welsh Government announced an extra £5 million to extend our High Street Rates Relief scheme for one further year into 2018-19. The scheme is unique to Wales and will support around 13,000 small and medium-sized businesses across the country this year.

“We’ve also been looking at more innovative public transport

solutions and have worked with local authorities to explore the impact of piloting more free town centre parking initiatives.”