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RET Update

Another year has come full circle and it's time to wish you all a very Happy Christmas.

Thank you again for your continued support. We recognise that partnership working takes effort and appreciate your commitment and willingness to collaborate across the region.



The first of our films launched at the WEFO Annual Event in November, highlighting the role of the team within the Cardiff Capital

Region. You can view and find out if you made the final cut [here](#) 😊. We've already started to develop our second film that will highlight the SME competitiveness priority, and this should be ready late spring.

Going forward we'll see a drive to ensure the region realises the full benefit from the current programmes. We also feel confident that the partnerships and networks we've built, will place us in a very good position to plan for the future, whatever the funding landscape might look like.

We look forward to working with you again in 2020

Lisa, Amy, Natalie, Nicola and Jan



Regional investment in Wales after Brexit

Further to the joint [Ministerial statement](#) issued in July by the Counsel General and Brexit Minister and Economy and Transport Minister the Welsh Government is continuing to work with partners to develop a future investment framework for Wales.

The Regional Investment for Wales Steering Group, chaired by Huw Irranca-Davies AM, continues to meet to draw on knowledge and experience from business, local authorities, academic institutions, the third sector and wider public sectors across Wales. The Group has met several times this year and will next meet on 17 December. Membership, papers and minutes from these meetings can be found [here](#).

In addition to the Steering Group, four sub groups, established during the summer, have been meeting monthly to help take forward the detailed work required in specific areas, including the drafting of the consultation

document for launch early next year.



Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, Lee Waters AM, with OECD officials at a stakeholder seminar in Cardiff

A two-year project with the OECD has also been underway since January to help ensure international best practice and effective regional governance are built into our future plans. The OECD visited Wales in June to gather feedback from Government and stakeholders and visited Wales again 25-29 November to inform their work and broaden engagement. This included an OECD seminar which brought together the Welsh Government, non-government stakeholders and international peers and practitioners to exchange information and expertise. Work will continue throughout 2020.

CCR Skills Board

The Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) Skills Partnership brings together a wide range of stakeholders, including businesses; industry bodies; higher and further education institutions; training providers; schools; local authorities and the Welsh Government.

The latest version of the Regional Skills Plan (RSP) was launched on 24th October at Malpas Court Mansion House in Newport. The event featured a message from Ken Skates AM, Minister for Economy and Transport, a launch of the [Skills Partnership website](#) and Skills Observatory, case studies, and an introduction to the plan from both Cllr Debbie Wilcox, Leader, Newport City Council (as was) and Leigh Hughes, CSR Director, Bouygues Construction UK and Chair, CCR Employment & Skills Board who said of the 4th published Regional RSP:

“The development of the Employment and Skills Plan has been led by the CCRSP and has involved a collaboration with business, education, training providers and Welsh Government, it is informed by Prosperity for All, the Employability Delivery Plan, Apprenticeships Skills Policy Plan, Economic Action Plan and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Recommendations contained within the plan will help to shape and influence Welsh Government’s approach to funding post-16 learning and details how the actions it will take working with partners over the next three years will support the [CCR Industrial and Economic Plan](#) objectives to accelerate economic and inclusive growth in the region.”

The full plan can be found [here](#).

Valleys Taskforce

The Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport has made a number of important announcements from the Valleys Taskforce since September.

The Ministerial Taskforce, left to right: Standing – James Davies, Lee Waters AM, Wendy Walters, Dawn Bowden AM. Seated: Cllr Andrew Morgan, Nicola Somerville, Josh Miles, Ruth Treharne. Absent from the photo is Kellie Beirne.



He recently launched the delivery of phase one of the Empty Homes Grant Scheme. £10 million has been set aside over two years, offering grants to eligible applicants who wish to bring an empty property back in to use. Rhondda Cynon Taf are leading this scheme across the Valleys Taskforce boundary and working with all of the Taskforce Local Authorities to ensure people from all areas within the boundary are able to apply. The funding will be available to those applicants who meet the empty homes criteria, further information and updates on the Local Authorities signed up to the scheme can be found [here](#).

Since September Taskforce subgroups have been meeting to discuss the seven key priorities for the Valleys Taskforce. An updated [delivery plan](#) was published on 28th November, the plan includes details about the sub-groups and their renewed actions for the remainder of the Taskforce. Further details on these actions will be incorporated into the plan before March 2020. In October the new members of the Taskforce met for the first time to discuss the priority themes.

The Taskforce worked in partnership with Transport for Wales throughout the autumn to deliver a series of community events across the valleys which offered the chance for communities to talk about transport infrastructure in their local area. The events were chaired by local Assembly Members and were well attended by local communities. The key issues raised during the events have been analysed and discussed by the Transport sub-group. The group are now in the process of agreeing a series of actions which will build on existing transport pilots and key infrastructure developments, such as the South Wales Metro, to improve public transport options across the valleys region.

On the 26th November the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport made an oral statement in Plenary where he outlined his vision for the Foundational Economy in Wales, the transcript can be found [here](#). 27 Valleys based projects out of 50 experimental projects across Wales were announced in October to trial different approaches to local economic development. The pilots have been boosted through the £4.5m [Foundational economy challenge fund](#) which has been part funded through the Valleys Taskforce.

The Valleys Taskforce have also been working with Business Wales to meet local AM's and develop plans for business surgeries across the Valleys throughout 2020. The business surgeries will provide local support and advice to existing business and be specifically tailored to the local communities

If you would like to know more about the work of the Taskforce, including the delivery plan, please follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) @TalkValleys / #OurValleys or visit our [website](#).

Working Wales

As of the 1st November the Working Wales service has been operating for six months.

Launched on 1 May, the service has already proved to make a real difference to people's lives. In just a short amount of time, we have been able to help over 20,000 customers.

Careers Wales has seen a marked increase in the amount of people making contact via their telephone helpline, live chat and e-mail services. The Careers Wales career centres have seen an upturn in the amount of customers requesting face to face meetings. The efforts to deliver services to people in their local communities have been facilitated through the support of partners, meaning we have increased our outreach presence in Jobcentres, Hwb's and other locations.

Events and outreach activity are an important part of the offer. This type of activity is one of the key ways to engage with stakeholders and partners and to speak directly with customers. Staff members who help to deliver the Working Wales service have attended over 80 events since 1st May. We have also presented at a number of stakeholder conferences and meetings, including the recent Communities for Work/+ conferences, where we were grateful to be provided with an opportunity to deliver an overview of the Working Wales service, enhance existing local relationships and explore how we can replicate the good working practices that are taking place across Wales.

Since July, following a guidance interview, each customer has been asked to complete a

customer survey, the findings of which have been very positive. Of those surveyed over 90% either agreed or strongly agreed that:

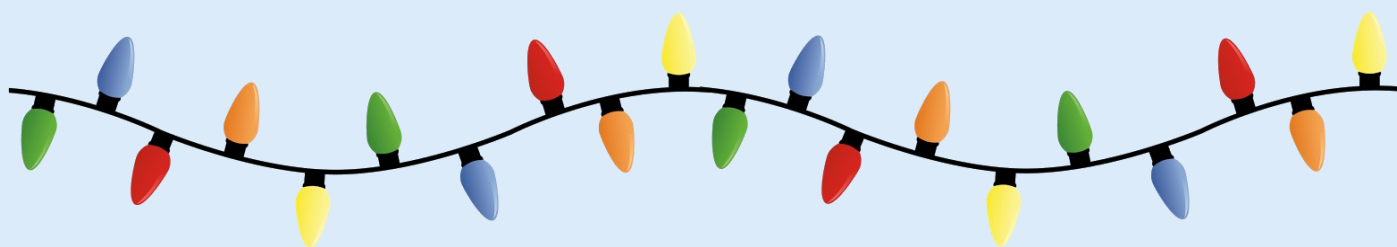
1. they were satisfied with the service they received
2. that they would recommend the Working Wales service to others in a similar position to them.



Left: Tony Daly - Merthyr and RCT Team Manager
Right: Alun Lloyd - Careers Adviser

The picture was taken at the opening of the new Calon Las Community Hub, in the Gurnos, Merthyr Tydfil. Working Wales were pleased to be involved in the re-development of this important community venue (led by the local authority) and have sponsored an 'interview pod', which will be used by partners and ourselves to deliver services to the local community. We will deliver Working Wales services from the venue every Thursday.

In summary, it has been a busy and productive 6 months and we look forward to developing our support offer to customers and partners.



WEFO Annual Event

The ESI 2014 – 2020 Annual Information Event 2019 was held on the 28th November at the Marriot Hotel Cardiff.

The event was opened by Peter Ryland, Chief Executive of WEFO who gave an overview of the progress and developments of 2014- 2020 programmes, highlighting some key successes including the high level of funding committed already, and focusing on the importance of partnership and co-operation now and in any future programmes.



Jeremy Miles AM, Counsel General & Brexit Minister

The key note speaker for the event was Jeremy Miles AM, Counsel General and Brexit Minister. He was keen to celebrate the results of the European funding invested in Wales and drew attention to Wales bucking the economic trends as a result of the money. Since 2007 EU funded programmes in Wales have created 50,000 new jobs, 13,500 new businesses and, supported 26,500 businesses. He also

outlined the four priorities of the Welsh Government for any future regional investment funds as:

- Reducing income inequalities for people, analysing the factors that create income inequality and reduce disposable and discretionary income.
- More productive and competitive businesses, including the vital role of innovation and research as well as alternative business models.
- Transition to a zero-Carbon economy, taking advantage of the opportunities this creates as well as reducing negative effects,
- Healthier and more sustainable communities, recognising different challenges in different communities and the role of local areas in identifying priorities in their places.

The work of the Regional Engagement Teams was featured and the audience were treated to the premier of the new [SE RET film](#) highlighting our role in the region. Delegates also heard from the OECD, who provided an update on their project to produce a report into best practice in regional funding management; and Rachel Garside Jones, the new Deputy Director of Regional Policy and Investment at the Welsh Government.

The event finished with a lively panel discussion and Q&A session chaired by Huw Irranca-Davies AM, chair of the All Wales Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC).



Huw Irranca-Davies AM chairing the Q&A panel.



Learning and Work Conference

We were delighted to be asked to facilitate a workshop at the Employability and Skills Wales Convention held by the Learning and Work Institute (LWI). The event was held in City Hall, Cardiff, with a fantastic range of presentations and workshops.



Lee Waters AM, Deputy Minister for Economy & Transport

The inspirational keynote speech from Lee Waters AM, Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, highlighted the need to ensure we have the right skills in place to adjust to the changing economy and the importance of the regional skills partnerships in meeting this challenge. He stressed that civil society needs to become bolder and less adverse to criticism in order to be innovative, grow the foundational economy and build success. Experimentation and scaling up successful pilots will be encouraged. Local procurement needs to focus on social value and not just best value. The drive to grow the number of apprenticeships will continue to be a key priority.

Other key messages from the day included how skills shortages are costing organisations £155m a year and the need to

work creatively with businesses to develop flexible learning opportunities to meet this gap and help address in- work poverty. Interregional collaboration and long – term planning and investments is key to building resilient regions. Improving basic skills has made a positive impact on productivity and social justice but further work is needed to improve the parity of esteem between vocational and academic education.



Huw Wilkinson and Tanya Hillman from Inspire to Work and Inspire to Achieve.

Thank you to Huw Wilkinson and Tanya Hillman who presented the regional and local perspectives on the Inspire to Achieve and Inspire to Work projects during our workshop on Supporting Young People in Employment: How Local Authorities are Using ESF in Wales.

Another thought-provoking and engaging event held by LWI – we look forward to the next one!

ERDF P2 Business Support

The ERDF P2 SME Competitiveness network are continuing to meet on a quartile basis. The network consists of ERDF P2 funded projects, Local Authority Economic Development team members, WEFO, Welsh Government and Cardiff Capital Region representatives meet to discuss key priorities and challenges for the region and provide groups members with key up-to-date relevant information. At the last meeting kindly hosted by Blaenau Gwent Council and chaired by Muhammad

Forouzan, the group received updates from the Cardiff Capital City Deal and Business Wales Tender Advice team. The network also discussed the lack of industrial space in the region and how local authorities can work together to tackle the issue. Effective communication by regional stakeholders about the availability of sites will be key.

The next meeting of the group will take place at Cardiff Castle in January.

The following articles showcase the work of many of the operations funded under ERDF P2.

Development Bank of Wales

The [Development Bank of Wales](#) is part of the ERDF Priority 2 funded Business Wales suite of interventions. They provide flexible business finance for companies based in Wales from £1,000 up to £5 million. To date across South East Wales, through the Wales Business Fund, the Development Bank have:

- Provided £40m of direct investment
- Leveraged £83m contribution from the private sector
- Invested in 105 business
- Created 471 jobs
- Safeguarded a further 805 jobs.

Case Study - ie ie Productions, Cardiff

Loan from the Wales Business Fund through the Development Bank of Wales.

Launched in 2016 and managed by the Development Bank of Wales, the Wales Business Fund is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government. Since launch the fund has been topped up and now stands at £180.9 million.

Loans and equity investments are available to Welsh micro to medium-sized businesses from £50,000 up to £2 million. Growing businesses can also benefit from follow-on funding from the Wales Business Fund.

Finance can be used for a range of business

needs, including hiring new staff. And that's what creative business ie ie Productions did with their loan.

With a number of award-winning documentaries to their name, Cardiff-based ie ie aims to produce experimental and multi-platform projects. These embrace Welsh culture and focus of female protagonists from diverse backgrounds. The loan has been used to create three new development producer roles at the all-female staffed company, including two new drama-specific freelance positions.

Managing Director Catryn Ramasut said: "We are committed to representing women in front of and behind the camera. We've made a conscious decision to focus on female talent and female protagonists."

The new posts will extend the company's pitching reach with a view to securing more multi-platform and broadcast commissions.

Catryn Ramasut with Joanna Thomas, the investment executive who brokered the deal.



Social Business Wales

Social Business Wales, delivered by the Wales Co-operative Centre, provides specialist business support to help the growth of social businesses across Wales. Social businesses include social enterprises, co-operatives, mutuals and employee owned businesses. So far across the South East region the operation has achieved:

- 181.2 jobs created
- 182 organisations assisted
- 94 organisation given equality and diversity support
- 97 organisations given sustainable development support

Social Business Wales launches its 'New Start' project

Social Business Wales is launching a new service in January to specifically support start-up social enterprises. Thanks to funding from the European Regional Development Fund and Welsh Government, the new service can offer free business support and advice to social enterprise start-ups, helping them create the strong foundations needed to build a thriving and sustainable business.

The service will be available in West Wales and the Valleys, including Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Torfaen. Its team of experts can offer one-to-one advice and a mentoring scheme to help social entrepreneurs from the ideas stage, to starting to trade, incorporating the business, and training people up.

By 2022 the project aims to help 250 new social businesses in Wales to get established and will also see around 200 new jobs created.

More information is available at a launch briefing taking place in Merthyr Tydfil on Wednesday 15 January. You can book a

free place at <https://new-start-south-east-launch.eventbrite.co.uk>.

Case Study - Education company becomes a co-op to grow the business

When the directors of teaching agency Equity Solutions Ltd realised their legal model was holding them back, they approached Social Business Wales to help them transform into a co-operative. This enabled them to enshrine co-operative values and access new tendering opportunities.

Equity Solutions Ltd is an education agency which supplies teachers and support staff to schools. It also provides bespoke services such as high quality tutoring for hard to reach, vulnerable or challenging learners.



Michael O'Neill, Lianne Mason and Nerys Owen

The three Directors, Michael O'Neill, Lianne Mason and Nerys Owen, were driven by a desire to see equity and fairness in the education sector, and raising attainment for all. They were committed to paying their staff fair rates, charging manageable fees to their partner schools and ensuring that services ensured quality over profits.

They had originally set up the business as a company limited by shares, but this legal model was preventing them from tendering for local authority contracts.

Realising that they needed to find a new structure, but keen to embed the social principles which had motivated them to start the business in the first place, they approached Social Business Wales for support.

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SBW advisor Tricia Morgan advised the Directors on various legal models which would suit their needs. They decided to become a co-operative with a company limited by guarantee legal structure.

The support from SBW went much further. Advice from a marketing specialist resulted in a marketing plan being produced. HR support to review and update contracts of employment, job descriptions, HR policies and develop a staff handbook helped the organisation strengthen its position as a fair

and ethical employer. As well as this, support was given to help the company develop an environmental policy, action plan and an eco-code.

By becoming a co-op, Equity Solutions has committed to uphold the principles of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. It has confirmed its commitment to being an ethical agency which pays fair wages and encourages colleagues to feel like part of a team.

It has also secured a new contract with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

Big Ideas Wales

Big Ideas Wales provides inspiration for young people to develop their enterprise aspirations and help them make decisions about business start-up. Since January 2016, the network of entrepreneur role models have now met 91,564 young people in schools, colleges, universities and youth groups across the South East region.

You can now hear from other entrepreneurs through our new **Podcasts**:

Spotify here: <http://ow.ly/VGpX50xdCbF...>

iTunes here: <http://ow.ly/EeZK50xdCe3>

YouTube here: <http://bit.ly/2pu3PnT>

To celebrate graduate start-ups in Wales, Universities Wales recently launch this promotional [video](#) showcasing many of the young graduates from our universities that have succeeded in business.

Closing Global Entrepreneurship Week, on 23/24th November, Big Ideas Wales hosted their **Bootcamp to Business** experience at the Urdd centre in Cardiff Bay. 38 successful participants shared this intensive learning experience led by entrepreneurs, to develop their ideas, meet like-minded young entrepreneurs to help them take their business forward.

We are calling all Primary schools: The **Enterprise Troopers** competition helps to develop teamwork, ambition, enterprise and creativity skills. Find more details about the competition and resources for schools [here](#). The closing date will be the 11th of May 2020.

Big Ideas Wales is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government

Participants of 'Bootcamp to Business' in Cardiff Bay



Business Wales

Business Wales continues to encourage the sustainable start and growth of Welsh business



91,564 Young People have been Inspired by role Models



14,039 Individuals and Businesses have been advised



Increase in Employment figure is 7,984



We have supported 751 young People Supported to develop their business ideas



1,820 New enterprises have been created



The total investment in enterprise is 117.3 million



We have 201 role models covering the South East Region



Increase in exports is now at 98.9 million

Results so far from the Business Wales Support packages in the South East Region

As the self-employment sector in Wales continues to provide jobs and investment in local economies, the Welsh Government's flagship business support service sees off another successful quarter.

With over 3,000 new businesses launched in less than 4 years and 13 jobs on average created every day, Business Wales, which is funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government, helps aspiring entrepreneurs take the first steps to self-employment via a series of workshops and one-to-one advisory and specialist support.

Our highly experienced team cover all aspects of starting a business, including business planning, research, sourcing finance, laws and regulations, marketing, tax, business structure, legal status, insurance and employing staff.

We deliver regular start-up workshops to further help budding entrepreneurs assess their skills and gain the confidence and practical understanding of what is necessary to start a business.

Check out the new case study on how Business Wales start up support has helped in Abergavenny [here](#).

*If you want to find out more about the Business Wales start-up support in South East Wales, phone **01656 868500** or email southwales@businesswales.org.uk.*

Business Wales, which is funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government, supports the sustainable growth of small and medium-size enterprises across the country by offering access to information, guidance and business support.



Social Business Growth Fund

EU Funding from Social Investment Cymru

The innovative use of ERDF funds by Social Investment Cymru at WCVA in supporting the third sector is proving a big hit. £2.3m has already been approved and been put to work in communities, helping transform lives across Wales

Social Business Growth Fund provides a blend of grant and repayable assistance linked to the creation of jobs, with the extra incentive of less to repay if more than the planned number of jobs is created. As Alun Jones, Head of Social Investment Cymru commented 'It does just what it says on the tin and a wide variety of different social businesses are using the moneys in support their growth

aspirations. We've funded a dog rescue centre, an ocean-going yacht, 2 children's play centres, 2 Care and Repair operations and a whole range of other ventures. It's been really interesting to see what's come forward'

'The success has been such that the funds for East Wales have almost already gone. We're recommending that people in the East Wales area move fast to give us a call while there's still some money there. For now, West Wales and the Valleys is fine, but we're always on the lookout for new and exciting growth projects'

The Social Investment Cymru team can be reached on 0300 111 0124 or sic@wcva.cymru.

