

# E-NEWSLETTER Winter 2020



## RET Update

2020 has been an incredibly challenging year for all EU funded projects but it's been amazing to hear about the innovative ways in which you've adapted delivery and been able to maintain support to your participants.

We hope that you'll find this Winter edition of our e-newsletter informative and we'd like to offer up a huge thanks to all of our contributors throughout this past year, your ongoing support is very much appreciated.

Wishing you all a Happy Christmas and best wishes for a better year in 2021.

*Lisa, Amy, Natalie and Karyn*



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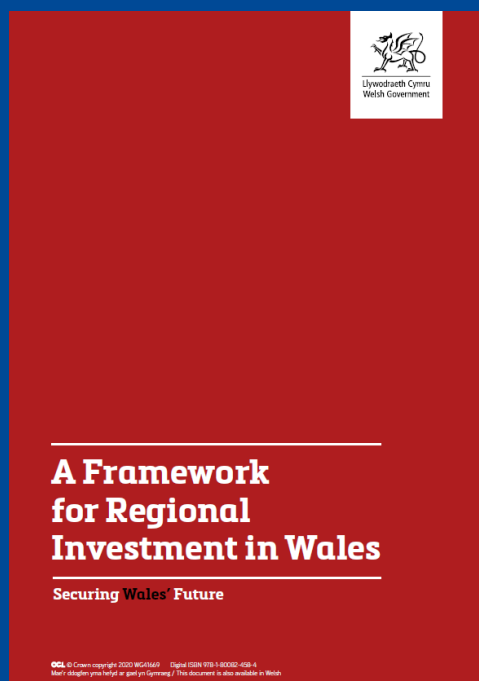
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## Update on post EU funding



On 18 November the Welsh Government published its Framework for Regional Investment to replace EU funds in Wales following collaboration with organisations across Wales, a project with the OECD and a public consultation on the proposals.

This has been overseen by the Regional Investment in Wales Steering Group, which includes members from a wide range of

sectors and organisations.

The Framework gives regions in Wales a far greater role in decision-making on how funds are spent and the investment priorities include support for business, tackling economic inequalities and deprivation across our communities, and the transition to a zero-carbon economy. [The Framework and more information on the work that has taken place in Wales to develop a post-EU regional investment policy can be found here.](#)

Since the Framework's publication, the [November Spending Review 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) set out some details on the proposed Shared Prosperity Fund, which will replace EU funding across the UK from 2021.

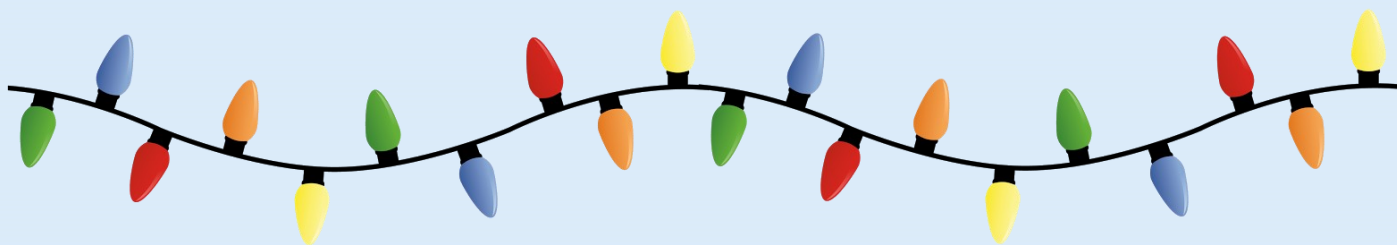
As part of the Spending Review, £220m has been committed to UK-wide pilot programmes and approaches for the Fund for 2021-2022, with the UK budget increasing up to £1.5bn in the years thereafter.

There is no information as yet on how the pilot funding for next year will be distributed, however details are expected from the UK Government in the New Year.

## Regional performance

These are the latest available headline figures for the performance of the ESI funded operations within the SE Region. If you would like more detail on the data please email us at [sewalesret@bridgend.gov.uk](mailto:sewalesret@bridgend.gov.uk) or see [Progress of programmes: EU Structural Funds 2014 to 2020 | GOV.WALES](#)

Fund	Indicator	Figures for the SE Region
ERDF	Enterprises assisted	4,739
	Enterprises created	1,470
	Jobs created	8,411
ESF	Participants assisted	111,774
	Participants supported into employment	14,522
	Participants gaining qualifications	51,127
	Participants in education / training	3,375



## WEFO update

### EU Exit Transition Period and EU Structural Funds 2014-20 Programmes

WEFO has recently issued a Frequently Asked Questions document entitled the 'EU Exit Transition Period and EU Structural Funds 2014-20 Programmes'. This FAQ document sits alongside beneficiaries' existing Funding Agreements and the WEFO Eligibility Rules. It provides reassurance that, from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, beneficiaries will continue to receive EU funding under the normal rules and should continue to deliver operations as they currently do.

It also sets out some further detail on the practical implications of the end of the transition period on areas such as procurement, GDPR and State Aid, however it is important to note that the obligations arising from Funding Agreements with WEFO will not change and will continue to remain in effect.

Beneficiaries that have not yet received a copy of this FAQ document can access it here <https://gov.wales/eu-structural-funds-programme-faqs-eu-exit-transition-period> or contact their WEFO Project Development Officer for a copy.

### State Aid

Under the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement, the UK will be bound by the EU's State Aid rules until the end of the transition period of 31 December 2020.

Thereafter, the UK could adopt a different approach, depending on the terms of any

future trade deal with the EU. At time of writing, there is still uncertainty on this position.

For operations that have already been approved and have state aid cover (including schemes that will expire at the end of 2020), then the rules and the applicable state aid cover continue to apply to the entirety of the delivery of the operation. For operations that are approved post 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 (or existing operations where new state aid cover is agreed), we will need to impose the applicable state aid conditions on beneficiaries via the terms and conditions of their funding agreement i.e. continue to place relevant conditions within the document and also reference the relevant state aid cover.

Specifically, with regard to Welsh Government GBER schemes, beneficiaries will be able to continue using these schemes for structural fund supported operations post 2020. All schemes will be re-registered in order that end dates can be extended to 31 December 2023 – please note the extensions will only be applicable to ERDF/ESF funding. In terms of the rules that need to be followed by beneficiaries in complying with the requirements of all GBER schemes these will not change. Once the Welsh Government State Aid Unit has completed the re-registration of all the necessary schemes it will issue a notification of the new registration numbers.





## Update from the CCR City Deal team

It's been another particularly busy period for us but we are delighted to be able to demonstrate some real momentum across a wide range of activities and to have played a full part in helping to address the many challenges Covid-19 has presented for our region.

Over the last few months, the Graduate Scheme has continued to adapt and respond in light of continued Covid-19 restrictions. The scheme has made good use of virtual recruitment processes and well as attending the South Wales Virtual Jobs Fair, hosted by Careers Wales and the CCR Skills Partnership, and held webinars to engage and reach out to local businesses that may be looking for additional support and resource.



In August we discovered we had been selected as a finalist in the Wales Transport Awards for its Services to the Transport Industry Award.



Following a successful executive search and selection process, the Cardiff Capital Region Regional Cabinet is delighted to endorse the appointment of Nigel Griffiths to the role of Chairperson of the Regional Business

Council.

The Challenge Fund in particular has made some significant progress including holding an initial briefing event with more than 100 delegates. The support programme is in

development and includes a series of workshops around critical success factors, the first of which was held early this month. In addition, the key step of agreeing the governance structure has been completed with advisory board members identified and terms of reference have been developed.



The most recent news from the CCR Cabinet is that they have just awarded £4.4 million to Zip World in the form of a 5 year repayable loan to replicate their successful North Wales adventure business on the Tower Colliery site. This investment will regenerate an iconic site creating significant economic benefits for the whole region. The Zip World Tower Project will create an anchor visitor destination in the City Region and, in so doing, will complement and support other regional attractions, as well as local suppliers, accommodation providers, cafes and shops. Set to be a world class destination, Zip World Tower will attract many new visitors to the region, providing yet another compelling reason to visit and stay in the area.

## Valleys Taskforce

The Deputy Minister delivered an oral statement on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> December, updating Members of the Senedd on the Valleys Taskforce. The statement included updates on housing, entrepreneurship and business support, Valleys Regional Park, Transport and the Valleys Taskforce contribution to the Transforming Towns agenda.

### Housing

So far over 500 applications have been received for the £10 million Empty Homes Scheme launched last autumn. Despite delays caused by the pandemic, local authorities involved in the pilot have reiterated their commitment to taking the scheme forward this financial year and provided match funding.

The benefits of this scheme are not limited to the regeneration of empty properties. It has also supported the foundational economy through the use of smaller, local construction businesses, and offered additional benefits to applicants using energy efficiency measures, contributing to the decarbonisation agenda.



### Entrepreneurship and Business Support

A pilot peer-to-peer entrepreneurs' network for valleys based foundational economy businesses recently concluded. Feedback has been positive and lessons will be used in development of a peer network under the Tech Valleys Programme. Business Wales

are considering how learning could be implemented in future development of business support initiatives.

### Valleys Regional Park

The Valleys Regional Park (VRP) has recently funded a new education centre at Bryngarw Country Park. As part of their work to develop volunteer programmes at Discovery Gateway sites, the VRP Guardians are developing nature-experience programmes in Bryngarw for the home-



schooling community. An educational trend which has accelerated this year. This type of outdoor engagement with nature is fundamental to meeting the challenges of the Climate Emergency.

The outcomes of a recent VRP survey, which sought to understand how the Covid-19 crisis has affected attitudes to local green space, demonstrated the critical importance of the natural environment to mental health and resilience.

In addition, Parc Bryn Bach in Blaenau Gwent will receive funding for remote working hubs embedded within each park. The spaces will be designed to blend with the natural environment. Users will have access to Wi-Fi, office furniture and other park amenities as well as benefitting from breaks in nature.

We have also

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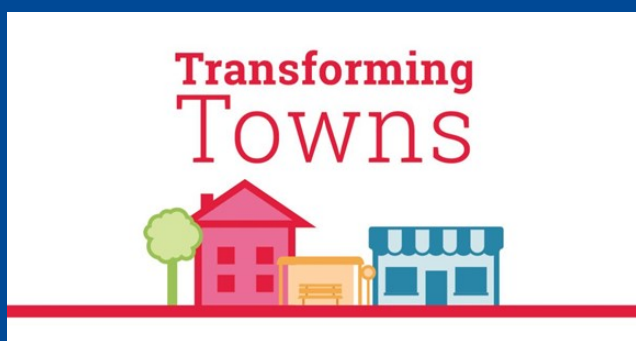


**Continued from page 5** contributed £80,000 to an archival foundation study for the Crucible project in Merthyr, which hopefully will provide a lasting legacy for industrial heritage in the South Wales valleys.

## Transport

One of the areas frequently discussed is the need for a regular, reliable express service that links the communities of the south Wales Valleys, without the need to travel to Cardiff or Newport. Welsh Government officials are developing a proposal for such a service, and we hope to make further announcements on this in the coming weeks.

## Transforming Towns



This year, the Taskforce wanted to offer support to smaller towns and villages across the valleys area affected by Covid-19 restrictions. The Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport recently wrote to

local authority leaders, inviting them to bid for £3m valleys taskforce funding which has been made available to support recovery in these areas. The funding will cover digital as well as physical improvements. Bids for funding are currently being assessed and cover a wide range of activity including support for local businesses, active travel routes and better digital provision across the region.

We are also funding projects in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Caerphilly which will test the concept of co-working spaces in smaller town centres. The outcomes of the pilot will help inform the approach to our long-term ambition to see around 30% of Welsh workers working from, or near from, home.

We will be making further announcements over the coming weeks, going into the New Year around Valleys Taskforce investment and policy interventions. We will also be focussing on evaluating the impact of the Valleys Taskforce since 2016, if you are a stakeholder who has been involved with the Valleys Taskforce and would like to contribute to evaluation of the programme but have not yet been contacted please get in touch at [ourvalleys@gov.wales](mailto:ourvalleys@gov.wales) to see how you can take part. A full evaluation of the programme will be published in the spring.

## Digital Strategy for Wales

Lee Waters MS, Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, launched the new Digital Strategy for Wales at the 'Digital technologies in Wales - Economic impacts & policy in turbulent times' conference.

The two day conference, hosted by Cardiff University, included a range of speakers outlining the impact of the pandemic on digital usage in Wales, the technology support available to businesses and how the digital innovation will drive economic growth



and productivity. The Digital Strategy for Wales will be published in chapters: [Digital Strategy for Wales: Mission 1 – Digital Services](#) | [Digital and](#) *Continued on page 7*

**Continued from page 6** [Data Blog \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales) to encourage engagement and feedback, with the final strategy to be published in March 2021. However, work to meet the aims of the strategy is already underway, including the creation of a new Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) to act as a hub of digital transformation expertise to test new approaches, develop common standards and improve skills. A new Chief Digital Officer for Wales, Glyn Jones, has been appointed to drive the advancements forward in support of the economic recovery.

The strategy is separated into missions, outlined in the diagram below.

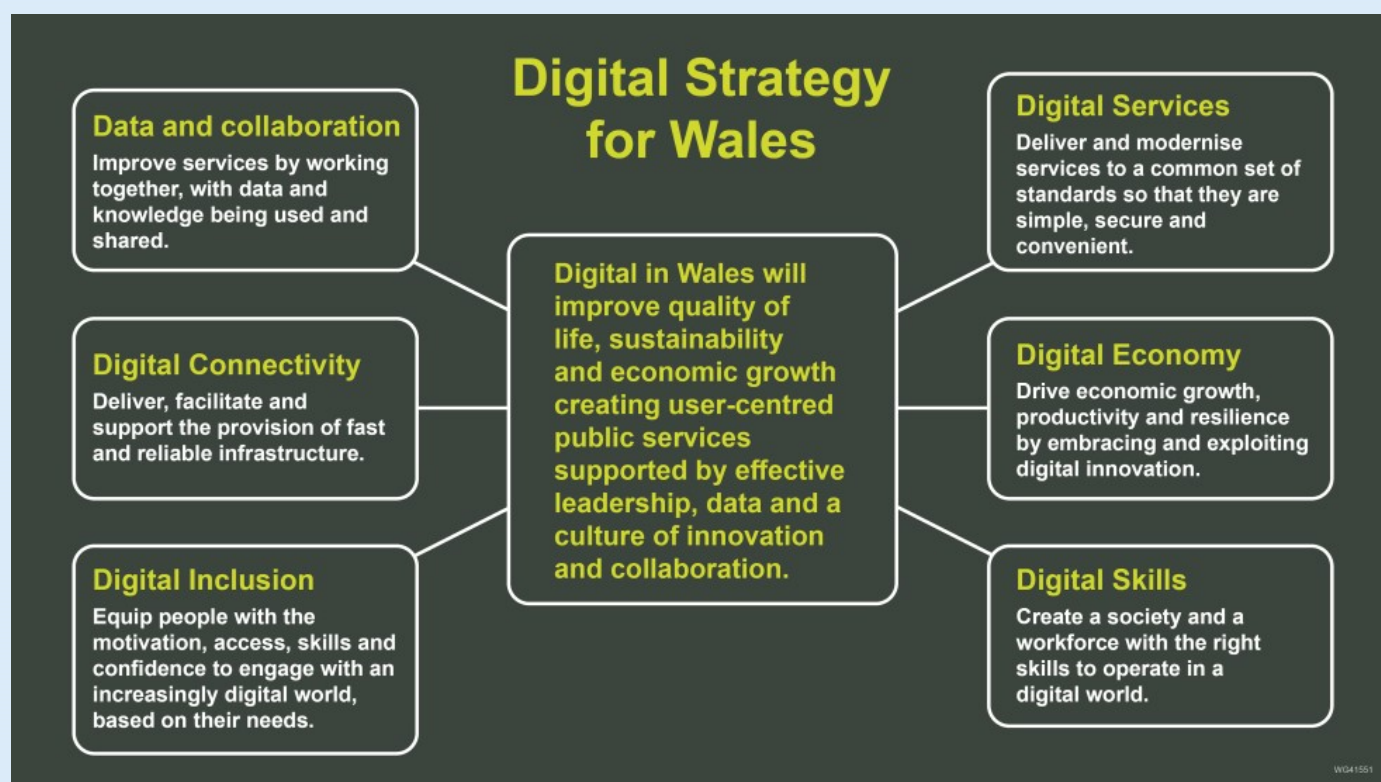
A pan-Wales Digital Economy Programme Board will be established to drive economic growth, productivity and resilience by embracing and exploiting digital innovation.

The results of the [Digital maturity survey - Superfast Broadband Project - Cardiff University](#) were also announced at the

conference. The survey provides evidence on how SMEs are adopting and using the digital technologies enabled by broadband access. Some of the results were:

- The majority of SMEs in Wales have adopted superfast broadband, with 61% reporting access through a fixed connection
- More SMEs are making use of foundational cloud computing services, with use by 70% or above of all businesses
- Broadband technology has helped mitigate a more severe impact from COVID

The importance of improving the efficiency of Welsh SMEs in improving Wales' future economic prospects and reducing the digital skills gap was emphasised by the presenters. However, the commitment shown throughout the event to overcome these challenges and drive innovation in Wales was inspiring and gave us all a much needed boost of positivity! Thanks to Cardiff University for a great event.



## Cardiff Met launch Global Academies



Cardiff Met officially launched their new [Global Academies \(cardiffmet.ac.uk\)](https://cardiffmet.ac.uk) at an on-line event on 1<sup>st</sup> December. The Global Academies bring together research, innovation and teaching to act as a catalyst for collaborative work to overcome global challenges. The three Global Academies are:

### Health and Human Performance

This Global Academy brings together expertise in wellbeing, public health, biomedical sciences, leadership and management, sport, physical activity, coaching and technology to take a holistic view of human performance.

### Food Science, Safety and Security

Bringing together expertise in technical, operational and commercial food production and biomedical sciences, along with nutrition, perceptual science and psychology.

### Human Centred Design.

Links expertise in design with technology, art, architecture and policy to address a diverse range of global challenges including decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure and the impact of public body decisions on future generations contributing and drawing on the

world-leading Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Academies enable partnerships with industry to be developed, enhancing services and products. A fascinating range of the innovative work undertaken already within the Academies was highlighted, including:

- Informing public policy with a UK study of public experiences during the COVID – 19 pandemic
- The creation of an 'iValueU' app, a mental and physical wellbeing resource for children, teachers and parents
- A new food entrepreneurship programme
- Improving safety in the food sector in Wales
- Designing products and services for people living with advanced dementia.

The Global Academies help students understand how their studies inform wider challenges. A further Global Academy in the theme of 'Place', will follow next year. We can't wait to see what else the Global Academies will achieve!



Professor Cara Aitchison, launching the event



## BEACON celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

First Minister Mark Drakeford joined a special virtual celebration event on 15<sup>th</sup> October to mark a decade of the BEACON project supporting the Welsh economy and creating green jobs.

BEACON is a collaboration led by Aberystwyth University, working with Bangor and Swansea Universities and the University of South Wales



Since its launch in 2010, the £30+ million EU funded project has built up a strong skill base in the bio business sector, by providing collaborative R&D support for green Welsh businesses; and positioning Wales as a

leader in world class research and innovation into the low carbon economy.

Developing products and services from sustainable natural sources is helping Wales to meet international targets for tackling climate change and recycling. Products include bio plastics, food additives, building materials, fuel, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals.

First Minister Mark Drakeford said “I’m pleased that we were able to support the extension of the BEACON+ project in Wales for another two years. This will enable even more businesses to innovate with the help of specialists and capitalise on the bio economy. This will help Wales to build our own expertise in this area.

“While we are dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, we must look towards how we will build a more resilient, greener and equal Wales to address the climate and environmental emergencies. BEACON and BEACON+’s exemplary research into renewables and sustainable technologies, together with their collaborations with businesses, are an essential part of the sustainable framework of Wales.”



## ESF P5: Public services reform and regional working

ESF Priority 5 ‘Public Services Reform and Regional Working’ was developed to help improve the institutional capacity of public sector organisations across Wales. Three projects have been approved to deliver

across the Cardiff Capital Region and we’ve set out a summary of their aims and objectives below. The RET has already brought the project leads together in the newly formed ESF P5 Network with a view to ensuring delivery is aligned, that complementary activity is identified and to explore mechanisms that will allow ‘live’ intelligence to be shared.

## ESF P5: InFuSe

### Introducing InFuSe – the Public Sector Skills Innovation Programme for the Cardiff Capital Region

Designed to help build innovation skills and competencies, InFuSe (the Innovative Future Services Public Sector Skills programme) is a collaboration between the ten Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) Local Authorities, CCR City Deal Office, Wales' Public Service Innovation Lab – Y Lab, Cardiff University and Nesta.



The £5.6m programme will build public sector Officer's skills, with the ambition of solving real-life societal challenges, whilst embedding a culture of regional working throughout. This

three-year programme will be based on a 'challenge-led' approach, and will identify two thematic areas of high importance to the Region, for example looking at problems and opportunities linked to Decarbonisation or Community Cohesion/Well-Being.

InFuSe will introduce approximately 120 Officers to new tools, that will help them adapt promising ideas using a process of experimentation, better use of data for decision making, and innovating with procurement, to help solve shared regional challenges. Taking a collaborative approach, they will consider how they can improve future service to create efficiencies, save money or improve the impact of service delivery for the people who use and deliver them.

InFuSe has also been designed to complement the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Challenge Fund and Officers will be encouraged to apply their learning to bid collaboratively for funding, to address regional challenges that will also help solve local issues.

## ESF P5: Valleys Regional Park

The Valleys Regional Park (VRP) has recently been awarded almost £1m to support the continued development of the regional partnership. Using a whole Valleys approach, the VRP aims are to connect people and place, bringing together the health of the land, the people and the economy.

The Valleys Regional Park partnership involves 13 local authorities from across South Wales from Torfaen in the East to Carmarthenshire in the west. Also involved are the four health boards in the region, Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Government and other stakeholders from the Third and public sectors. The additional

funding is awarded through Priority 5 of the European Social Fund and builds on the £650k previously provided by Welsh Government through the Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys.



With this funding the Valleys Regional Park partnership will work together to support;

- A long term regional focus for the management of Valleys landscape assets;
- The greater use of green spaces for well-being through

***Continued on page 11***

- personal choice and social prescribing;
- An increase in visitors numbers and spend within Valleys destinations;
- Improved partnership working across all sectors and with communities, building skills and capacity;
- The influencing of public sector policy to reflect the needs of Valleys communities

and the long term improvement to landscapes across the Valleys.

More information on the VRP can be found in the website [Valleys Regional Park](#) and their social media channels @LovetheValleys.

## ESF P5: CIEC Wales

### The Circular Economy Innovations



**Circular Economy  
Innovation Communities**

Communities (CEIC Wales) is a £3.7M Welsh Government and EU funded partnership between Swansea and Cardiff Metropolitan Universities to support the organisational development of the public sector to address the challenges it faces. CEIC (pronounced “cake”) aims to enable public service managers to co-create new products and to develop new service solutions, enhance productivity, and deliver Circular Economy (CE) benefits to their organisations.

Aimed at leaders in the Swansea Bay and Cardiff Capital regions, through a series of 10-month fully funded programmes, the CEIC interventions comprise dynamic workshops, site visits, action learning, peer learning and expert support. CEIC is also tasked to embed innovation “Communities of Practice” to implement organisational development and

support regional working in Welsh public services. This will enhance participants’ knowledge of applying circular economy knowledge and principles within their organisations and meet the goals of the All Wales Future Generations Act 2015.

The first Swansea Bay Region cohort is clustered in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire commencing March 2021, planning is in place for the Cardiff Bay Region to commence April 2021, subject to Covid-19 Restrictions. For further information please follow this link [Circular Economy Innovation Communities \(CEIC\) Programme - Swansea University](#)





## ASTUTE 2020 news

### £4m research funding boost for Welsh manufacturing sector

Manufacturing businesses across Wales can remain at the forefront of innovation, thanks to £4 million of EU funding announced by the Welsh Government. Thanks to the additional funding from the European Regional Development Fund, ASTUTE 2020 can continue to support businesses until September 2022.

Led by Swansea University in collaboration with Aberystwyth University, Cardiff University, the University of South Wales and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, ASTUTE 2020 has been collaborating with industry for ten years, delivering high impact demand-led research, development and innovation within the manufacturing sector across Wales.



ASTUTE 2020's world-class academics and highly qualified technical experts utilise a multi-disciplinary approach that

encompasses research, latest innovations, specialist expertise and state-of-the-art facilities.

The team supports businesses to de-risk and implement change, exploit new and existing opportunities and develop sustainable products and services through integrated application of knowledge, information, equipment, materials and people.

Most recently, FSG Tool & Die Ltd. based in Rhondda Cynon Taff collaborated with the ASTUTE 2020 team with great success, further developing the company's understanding of manufacturing aluminium food containers. Managing Director, Paul Byard, said:

"ASTUTE 2020 has helped FSG to develop forming tools to effectively produce aluminium foil trays consistently. The Computational and Design of Experiments approach has advanced our knowledge to understand certain design limitations, minimise variation and improved the manufacturing process."

Minister for Economy, Transport, and North Wales, Ken Skates, said:

"The coronavirus pandemic has shown how incredibly important it is our manufacturing sector has the support and resources it needs to adapt its processes and operations as required.

"I am delighted this funding will support the sector and am confident it will help us find important, innovative solutions as we continue to navigate this public health crisis and shape life after it."

[www.astutewales.com](http://www.astutewales.com)

[info@astutewales.com](mailto:info@astutewales.com)

07934 509414

*Merry*  
CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY  
*New Year*