



RET update

Spring has sprung and we're sure you are as delighted as us at the arrival of longer sunny days and new freedoms to enjoy them.

However, the winter period has been a busy one for us and EU funded projects, who have been working innovatively to deliver support to individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic. You can read about some of their fantastic work in this bumper edition.

We've been developing new infographics to help promote the wide range of ESF funded provision available in the region ahead of Employability Day on 30th April. They are available on our website here <https://www.sewales-ret.co.uk/infographics/>

We've also been working in partnership with the WCVA's 3-SET team and Welsh Government to enable suppliers of employment and health related services on the DWP framework to better understand the employability landscape in Wales.

Our cross-regional ERDF Innovation and Research group have benefited from presentations on the new Horizon Europe programme and how Innovate UK is driving progress across the Cardiff Capital Region.

Looking ahead, we'll be planning some more information events soon, further details to follow...

Stay safe and happy reading!

Lisa, Amy, Natalie and Karyn - SE Wales RET

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Next steps for post-EU funding

On 3 March, the UK Government announced further details on how replacement EU funds will be made available via the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Re-branded the Community Renewal Fund (CRF) for the 2021-22 pilot year, the fund will make £220m available UK-wide to pilot approaches to the longer-term Shared Prosperity Fund.

The CRF prospectus ([UK Community Renewal Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK](#)) notes that 90 per cent of funding will be revenue and will support bids of up to £3m. The fund will focus on skills, local businesses, communities and place, and employment, and will be run on a competitive basis.

The UK Government has identified 100 priority places for the CRF and the fund will be led by local authorities who are expected to publish shortlists of projects before noon 18 June. You can find the list here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/966987/List_of_Places_A-Z.pdf. Bids will then be assessed by the UK Government's Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, with announcements on successful bids made in July. All projects must be completed by 31 March 2022.

Organisations interested in applying for funds via the CRF should contact their local authority.

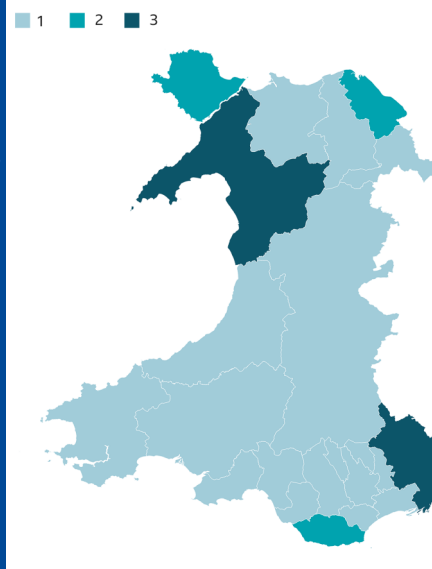
Information on the long-term Shared Prosperity Fund beyond the CRF pilot year is expected to be published by the UK Government in July.

As part of the UK Budget announcement on 3 March, the UK Government also announced details of its UK-wide Levelling-up Fund and

Community Ownership Fund, which will also use the financial assistance powers of the UK Internal Market Act to spend in Wales.

The Levelling-up Fund will be led by local authorities and make at least £800m available between Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Levelling Up Fund: Priority areas
Priority group by local authority



Funding will focus on Transport, Regeneration and Cultural Investment, and will support projects of up to £20m, with the potential to rise to £50m for transport projects. You can find the prospectus here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-fund-prospectus>.

The Community Ownership Fund will provide matched-funding to enable community groups to buy local assets or take over local amenities at risk of being lost. Bidding will open by June, when a bidding prospectus will be issued.

More information on each of the funds is available on the UK Government website.

The latest meeting of the Welsh Government's Regional Investment for Wales Steering Group, comprising stakeholders from local government, the HE/FE, and third sectors, and business, was held on 24 March, and minutes and papers for this Group, as well as the Regional Investment for Wales Framework, are published on the Welsh Government website for information.

WEFO

2014—2020 EU Structural Funds Programme in Wales: Impact and benefits to the people, communities and businesses of Wales

WEFO has just published a new booklet celebrating the achievements and benefits of EU Structural Funds programmes for the current 2014-2020 programming round for the people, communities and businesses of Wales. The booklet contains a number of projects and case studies highlighting these successes and the broad range of projects supported by EU Structural Funds across Wales; from cutting edge research and innovation, vital business support, new infrastructure and regeneration of town centres, to improving the skills and employability prospects for the people of Wales. You can read the booklet here <https://gov.wales/eu-structural-funds-programme-2014-2020-impact-and-benefits-people-communities-and-businesses-wales>.

FAQs on the EU Exit Transition and Post Transition Period

Updated guidance and advice on the EU Exit Transition and Post Transition Period for project managers is available on the Welsh Government website. This update addresses post transition requirements in respect of State Aid and procurement, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the EU Settlement Scheme. You can read the guidance <https://gov.wales/eu-exit-transition-post-transition-period-and-eu-structural-funds-2014-20-programmes-faqs>.

FAQs on the impact of Coronavirus

Updated advice and guidance on the coronavirus (COVID 19) for project managers delivering EU-funded projects in these challenging times is also available on the Welsh Government website here <https://gov.wales/eu-structural-funds-programme-faqs-effect-coronavirus>. Please keep

checking the website for the latest information.

Senedd Elections

With the Senedd elections due to take place on 6 May, please see below advice for EU Structural funds project leads / beneficiaries plus confirmation of WEFO operations during the Welsh Government pre-election period (commencing 0:00 hours on 25 March 2021 until 23:59 hours on 6 May 2021).

Publicity / Promotional activity which supports the delivery of EU funded projects (who have already received approved and announced funding) can continue e.g. use of WG and EU branding / logos on websites and small promotional items; projects running information / networking events for participants promoting their project. This would be considered day to day business activity and acting in compliance within the terms of funding. **However projects should not explicitly promote their funding during this time.**

New or additional funding announcements and any associated promotion will be paused. Any projects which have received approval for funding and WEFO has not announced this funding, will not promote this during the pre-election period. Those who may receive approval during the pre-election period, will receive this on embargo and are not to promote this during this time.

Regarding research activity, Welsh Government led projects will pause activity at this time (guidance has been issued on what should be paused and any exceptions), all other lead beneficiaries should follow their own guidance on how to proceed during an election as to what activities may continue. We are **not** instructing you to stop procurement or research activity.

If you have any queries, please contact WEFO Communications on wefo-communications@gov.wales.

CCR update

Graduate Scheme

In January, despite unprecedented levels of uncertainty continuing to dominate the business environment, the scheme inducted its largest cohort to date. It has continued to engage with businesses virtually, working with Global Welsh exploring the value of networking and holding a workshop with Natwest Business Builder. From a graduate perspective, the Scheme also attended the All Wales Virtual Careers Fair earlier this month, engaging with thousands of students and showcasing the region as a destination to kick-start their graduate career.

Challenge Fund

Over the last few months the Challenge fund has been open for Expressions of Interest applications, which will now be assessed with a view to confirming the first Challenge by April 20th. Workshops will then recommence throughout the summer months to help with further expressions of interest on new challenge themes. For more information on the themes and the process please see <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/innovation/our-partnerships/cardiff-capital-region-challenge>

Housing Fund

The application window for Homes for the Region closed in January with 18 applications received across nine of the ten local authorities. The number of opportunities

identified substantially exceeded expectations. Funding award letters will be issued to successful applicants shortly.

The Foundry

The new compound semi-conductor foundry in Newport is going well and as previously reported the facility is now in production and out-performing expectations in terms of both volume and quality. It has created 110 new high-value jobs - 95% of which are in the CCR, and safeguarded 546 existing jobs. There has also been further investment such as the £50M invested in CSA Catapult (70 jobs) which is co-located in Foundry.

Zip World



This new project is progressing as planned with both the Phoenix zip line and Tower Coaster scheduled to open in late spring (subject to covid-19 regulations). The Phoenix zip line is currently being safety tested and the Tower Coaster is under construction.

Welsh Government employers' brochure



Information on the Welsh Government's employer campaign - 'We're in your corner' – is now available on their website and is detailed in the new brochure which can be found here <https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/were-your-corner>

Included is information on the Welsh Government range of programmes including an employer's toolkit aimed at improving employment opportunities and conditions for those with a disability.

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.

Fund	Indicator	Figures for the SE Region
ERDF	Enterprises assisted	4,724
	Enterprises created	1,473
	Jobs created	8,664
ESF	Participants assisted	116,964
	Participants supported into employment	14,675
	Participants gaining qualifications	52,222
	Participants in education / training	3,477

Active Inclusion

European funding may be coming to an end, but there's still a chance to benefit from Active Inclusion funding.

Could your organisation run a project that provides paid, subsidised work placements that help people who are out of work to become more employable? Or a specialist 'engagement' project that can help those who are furthest from employment to take the first steps towards a job?



Paid work placements might sound similar to the UK Kickstart scheme, but they're open to people of 25 and over as well as young people, and although the maximum length of placement is the same at six months, there's a lot more flexibility involved in terms of the hours to be worked and the amount of support that can be provided before starting the paid work.

Being European funding, there is the inevitable requirement to provide match funding, but this varies according to area and age group. For participants aged 25+ in the West Wales and the Valleys area, the funding will cover at least 90% of the total costs.

The project funding is 'part two' of the application process, the first part being to prove your eligibility – and both parts can be accessed through the Multi Application Portal (MAP) at <https://map.wcva.cymru>. Once you've passed the first stage you'll be on WCVA's 'approved beneficiary list' and automatically invited to apply to Active Inclusion as soon as the round is open.

If you're in any doubt as to whether this is for you, why not contact the Active Inclusion team on activeinclusion@wcva.cymru or ring them on 0300 111 0124 and they will arrange for someone to talk to you on the phone or via video conferencing. WCVA, as an 'intermediate body' for the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) employs staff to support and guide you through the process of record keeping and making claims, as well as every step of the application process.

Unemployment is on the rise in Wales, but projects funded by WCVA's Active Inclusion Fund are fighting back as can be seen in this [video](#). Please visit their website for more information: <https://wcva.cymru/funding/active-inclusion-fund/>

Valleys Taskforce



In 2016 the Valleys Taskforce was established to ensure we are doing all we can to make the Valleys a great place to live and to invest. We wanted people who live and work in the Valleys to feel positive about the future and to make sure public services in Valleys communities are good quality, easily accessible and that people feel connected to the outstanding landscape on their doorstep.

Since then, the Taskforce have invested over £30 million into the Valleys. A breakdown of the investment is included on the next page.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the work of the Taskforce and we have adapted our funding to support the unique issues faced by communities within the south Wales valleys region.

In November 2020 the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport invited Local Authorities to bid for a proportion of £3m funding for smaller towns not traditionally targeted through regeneration funding. The focus of the funding is on supporting the impact Covid-19 has had in these areas which will facilitate trading and public safety in response to Covid-19.

As part of this funding, four remote working hubs are being developed across Rhondda Cynon Taf (Llwynypia Courthouse and RHA) and Caerphilly CB (Winding House

and Ty Penallta). The spaces can be used by public, private and third sector employees and help to encourage new partnerships between industry, Welsh Government, local government and others. These local facilities provide a real alternative to working from home without returning to a traditional commuting pattern.



Two more hubs are also being developed as part of the Valleys Regional Park Discovery Gateway offer at Llyn Llech Owain, Carmarthen and Parc Bryn Bach, Blaenau Gwent. The hubs will be embedded within each park and 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.

This month, the Taskforce published its final report. You can access the full report here – <https://gov.wales/taskforce-valleys>.

As we have approached the end of this programme, we have been conscious of the need for the outputs of the taskforce to go well beyond this term of government. We have worked hard to embed our work in the long-term plans for the Welsh Government and via partnership working. The taskforce has discussed what we believe the strategic priorities should be for any future delivery programme to focus on, These suggestions have been set out clearly for an incoming government to consider.

By The Valleys Taskforce Programme Team

Our Valleys, Our Investment

A summary of the Taskforce's contribution since 2016



The Welsh Government invested **£12m** into the Empty Homes Grant. **Over 600 applications** have been received for the Empty Homes Grant.



Over 600 people from across the valleys attended Taskforce events focussed on local community issues, transport, business support and landscape and environment.

£100k invested into expanding the Big Bocs Bwyd pilot into the valleys. Five schools will have access to Big Bocs Bwyd containers which will provide families with food and develop food literacy.

£7m invested to develop 12 Discovery Gateways across the Valleys.



Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly and Pontypridd each provided with **£200k** to develop ambitious integrated transport hubs.

£250k invested in Transport for Wales led integrated responsive travel scheme in Blaenau Gwent.

£39k invested in a peer-to-peer network bringing together 10 Valleys based business founders to offer mutual support and boost resilience.



£2.4m provided to support 27 experimental projects aimed at strengthening the foundational economy.

£650k invested into the re-development of Maesteg Town Hall.



9 local authorities applied for up to **£3m** of funding to support smaller town centres with COVID recovery. Four remote working spaces created to support the Welsh Government's ambition to enable 30% of people in Wales to work closer to home.

£170k was invested to develop remote working hubs at Llyn Llech Owain and Parc Bryn Bach.

The Valleys Taskforce has helped more than **7000 people** get into employment.



£75k invested in the development of a pilot Alumni scheme for 10 secondary schools in the Taskforce area. **230 alumni** working with Careers Wales to develop networks with their former schools – offering support and guidance. Secondary schools across Wales are able to access a toolkit, developed by Future First, to support them to develop their own alumni scheme and help young people get the best start to their future careers.

Valleys based business Dog Furiendly secured a **£75k** investment from a syndicate of South Wales-based angel investors and Angels Invest Wales following a Dragons' Den style pitch event hosted by the Valleys Taskforce in partnership with Be The Spark.

£1.28m invested in development of a world renowned culture and heritage project at Cyfarthfa Castle.

Wales Tech Week dates announced for 2021



Following the success of the first Wales Tech week last year, it has been confirmed that the event will be repeated on an even bigger scale. The free event, created by Technology Connected, will take place from 21st to 25th June 2021, bringing together leading figures in

the global technology community. The virtual event will be held on a number of 'stages' throughout the week, featuring interactive workshops, talks and panel sessions on a wide range of topics including Cyber, AI, Data, Diversity and Equality, Fintech, Investment, MedTech, Skills and Creative industries.

The event will showcase some of the widely recognised innovation taking place within the thriving Welsh technology industry.

Further information can be found on the Technology Connected website: <https://technologyconnected.net/wales-tech-week/>

Turing Scheme

At the end of December the UK Government announced that a new programme, the **Turing Scheme**, will replace the UK's participation in Erasmus+. It will provide funding for placements and exchanges starting in September 2021. The new scheme will be administered by the same partnership of British Council and Ecorys which has been delivering Erasmus+ in the UK for a number of years. You can read more details on the scheme website <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/>.

The UK continues to participate fully in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps

2014-2020 programmes and projects successfully bid for during these programmes will continue to receive EU funding for the full duration of the project. For further information please visit the website of the Erasmus+ UK National Agency: <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/the-transition-period>



Upcoming WCVA events

Along with partners SCVO, NICVA, NCVO and the Wales Civil Society Forum on Brexit; WCVA will be co-hosting two sessions to provide an update on what has happened since our formal departure from the EU. The sessions will allow organisations to discuss what areas are important to them following our withdrawal and how the sector can position itself to influence and engage with relevant structures and institutions in the future.

The first, on 14 April, will focus on Wales and the second on 23rd April will look at each nation in the UK.

You can register for the two events on the following links:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/life-after-eu-membership-what-next-for-the-third-sector-in-wales-tickets-144990928771>

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/life-after-eu-membership-what-next-for-civil-society-in-the-uk-tickets-146638739417>

Project news: Celtic Advanced Life Science Innovation Network (CALIN)

CALIN is an Ireland-Wales INTERREG operation funded by ERDF. It is an advanced life science network connecting business, academia and healthcare with experts from six leading universities across Ireland and Wales and is an opportunity to engage with leaders in advanced medical and pharmaceutical science, nanotechnology and biotechnology.

Case Study

Disease targeting treatments are being developed against all types of illnesses, including cancer, using antibodies from sheep.

While drugs have been developed to treat cancer, bacteria and viruses, they are not able to target specific sites in the body. Chemotherapy, for example, will target healthy cells as well as cancer cells, which can result in side-effects such as hair loss. But scientists believe they have found a way to solve this using antibodies that are part of

our immune system.

“Finding an exact antibody that binds to a selective target is like looking for a needle in a gigantic haystack,” said Professor Arwyn Jones, from Cardiff University. “This can, however, be done by ... us[ing] molecular biology techniques and a harmless virus that is used to infect bacteria that then act as surrogate antibody producing factories.”

Llandysul-based IG Innovations, which produces antibodies in sheep, has teamed up with Cardiff University through CALIN to work on this project. Sheep are used because they produce a wide range of high-quality antibodies. As the genetic code for each antibody is known this will allow researchers to genetically identify the types that bind to a selective target. So, with cancer, the antibody would join with the chemotherapy drug and it will only target the specific cancer cells, not the healthy cells.

It is hoped they will be able to manufacture them on a much larger scale and possibly be able to offer them as new therapeutic or diagnostic entities.



Project news: Technocamps celebrate International Women's Day



Building on the Legacy of ITWales, Technocamps held their annual International Women's Day Celebration event on Monday 8 March 2021.

The virtual event welcomed over 100 participants to the celebration. The evening usually sees guests travelling from all parts of the country to attend. Although this year looked slightly different, they made the most of the technology available and hosted a webinar.

This year was the 21st anniversary of the event which focuses on women in STEM. The theme was 'Choosing to Challenge: Gender Equality in STEM'. Guest speakers included:

- Kirsty Williams MS, Welsh Government Education Minister
- Jacqueline de Rojas CBE, President of techUK and Co-Chair of the Institute of Coding
- Gwen Parry-Jones OBE, CEO of Magnox Ltd
- Nia M Davies, Head of Education at BBC Cymru Wales

To start the evening, we heard from Technocamps Delivery Officers Nia, Rama, Lauren, Catherine, Teri and Laura who discussed their experiences as women in STEM and how they think we can challenge the status quo.

"If you want to change the world, get into Tech" – Dr Catherine Teehan, Technocamps

Kirsty Williams MS discussed the future of

education in Wales and how we can build back better in a post-COVID Wales:

"We have made great strides to adjust gender equality in STEM... but we've still got an awful long way to go and a lot to do"

Jacqueline de Rojas's talk highlighted achievements of women in STEM, how far gender equality has come and how far it has to go:

"If you think that diversity doesn't matter or that it's not your problem to solve, choose a career in technology, in computer science, in digital so that you can become part of the solution."

Gwen Parry-Jones gave us a lesson in Nuclear Physics, stereotyping and the importance of gender equality:

"Diversity and inclusion is not an option, it is an absolute imperative."

The evening finished with an inspirational session from Nia M Davies, who discussed her career path and the challenge of creating engaging and informative content for Wales's children during the lockdown:

"Making the best possible content for learners with the aim of transforming their lives is a responsibility I feel privileged to have."



Project News: Learning to Grow

Adapting services during the pandemic



Learning to Grow works with people with mental health, autism and learning disabilities who are long term unemployed. The project helps participants to build new work-related skills through hands-on horticulture, woodwork, IT and craft activities.

COVID 19 has had massive impact on their lives and the project has adapted its services to give their participants as many options as possible to keep them connected, engaged and mentally strong.

In the first few weeks of lockdown feedback from many participants highlighted their increased anxiety and worries about the unknown and how they were going to cope. So the project set up new tailored communication links:

- Daily contact by phone and support to access online communications
- Sign posting to services offering support or discounts at this time.
- WhatsApp groups to achieve a peer lead online community

- Zoom sessions such as cookery lessons. Training online was introduced and delivered on this platform with support from Adult Learn Wales
- Weekly Newsletter which included wellbeing suggestions for the week ahead
- Activity packs distributed on a weekly basis
- Growing Space YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCr9eK41QvYflgiYrfruBrpg>
- Regular updates to their social media and website
- Over 500 wellbeing and educational worksheets sent out to participants via email or post.

Connecting with Nature

Project staff have also been distributing young plants and seeds to participants encouraging them to conduct their own gardening. Easy to assemble bird box kits have been delivered, together with worksheets on identifying garden birds, making simple bird feeders etc. Participants were encouraged to keep records, take photos and share information about their findings. One to one walks and nature trails arranged helping those struggling with isolation. The fully active timetable continues to develop, and new activities are added to every week.



Project news: Jobsense



JobSense works with people with a sensory loss to promote their talents in the current job market and find solutions to common job searching barriers to enable them to secure volunteering and paid employment.

1 in 5 adults in the UK are deaf or have hearing loss.

Only 27% of blind and partially sighted people are in employment.

JobSense understands the importance of breaking down barriers people with a sensory loss can face at work. We work with employers to ensure that they receive support to successfully recruit people with

hearing or sight loss into their organisations in an accessible and sustainable way.

During these difficult times, JobSense is open for referrals. Most work is carried out remotely but they can support with digital skills. Participants must be aged over 25 and live in one of the following areas: Cardiff, Newport, Vale of Glamorgan, Monmouthshire, Powys, Wrexham, and Flintshire. Participants must be long-term unemployed (12 months or more) or economically inactive.

Please contact them on info@jobsense.org.uk or 07442 998297 or visit their website at www.jobsense.org.uk

JobSense is a partnership between RNID, COS and ELITE.



The Start Something Good challenge - NOW OPEN!



Big Ideas Wales has launched the **Something Good Social Enterprise Challenge 2021** for young people aged 11-18 living in Wales.

The challenge is to think of a solution to something that would have a positive impact

on people around you or in your community – a new social business idea!

There are two age categories: 11-16 (16 and under) and 16-18 (post 16). The regional winners in each category will have £100 to donate to their chosen local social enterprise or charity, as well as Big Ideas Wales hoodies! One winning idea (in the 16-18 age category) will receive up to £200 as well as mentoring support to help them develop their business idea.

Entries must be received by 6pm Wednesday, 28th April 2021.

For details on how to enter, timeline, useful resources and much more, go to: www.bigideas.wales/startsomethinggood Or for Twitter / Instagram / Facebook: @BigIdeasWales