# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Progress on implementation of the Export Action Plan** |
| **DATE**  | **14 December 2021** |
| **BY** | **Vaughan Gething, Minister for the Economy** |

Around this time last year, the Welsh Government’s Export Action Plan was published, as part of a suite of plans to deliver our International Strategy. I want to update Members on the range of actions we have taken to both inspire and assist exporters in Wales over the first twelve months in the implementation of the Plan, which is a key commitment in our Programme for Government.

Clearly, the past 18 months has seen unprecedented challenges for international trade, including for businesses in Wales, with the combined impacts of COVID-19 and more complex trading requirements with the EU, our largest trading partner. This is reflected in the most recent provisional export statistics, which show the value of goods exports for Wales was £13.5 billion in the year ending June 2021, down £2.0 billion (13.1%) compared to the year ending June 2020 (and down £4.3 billion (24.1%) compared to the year ending June 2019).

This demonstrates the continuing challenge for government, businesses, our stakeholders and partners and the importance of working together on our collective longer-term ambition to deliver export growth in Wales. The Export Action Plan was put in place to provide immediate assistance to businesses to support their recovery; to re-invent and adapt our support to meet the needs of exporting businesses; and, ensure our exporters are prepared for any new trading requirements as a result of new free trade agreements, including with the EU.

Our strengthened team of International Trade Advisors (ITAs) has played a crucial role in providing rapid advice, guidance and support to businesses in dealing with these challenges working closely with the wider export support eco-system in Wales and with UK Government officials across a range of departments. I have also visited a number of Welsh exporters to hear first-hand how they have adapted their businesses to cope with the current global challenges and how they have utilised Welsh Government support to find new export opportunities.

The Plan also contains a series of actions to drive the growthof Welsh exports in the longer term, increasing the contribution that exports make to the Welsh economy. The first element focusses on inspiring businesses to begin to export. During this year, we have strengthened our Export Exemplar campaign to highlight the successes of our Welsh SMEs who already export, as a means to encourage others to take up the export journey. To date, we have seen an uplift in traffic to the Business Wales Export website when compared to the same period (pre-pandemic). The campaign has also received positive media coverage on a number of our Exemplars including to national trade titles.

Our integrated marketing campaign continues to promote the export stories of our Exemplars to inspire others to start their export journey. A number of our Exemplars also took part in our annual Export Conference in March to further promote the benefits of exporting, addressing issues around market access and highlighting market opportunities, with over 100 delegates participating.

Another key element of the Plan is to build export capability in Wales. As part of this, we have delivered a comprehensive programme of webinars on exporting for Welsh businesses and bolstered our online content for exports, through the Business Wales platform. This includes the online Export Hub, providing live information on a range of export issues, as well as new online export training modules supporting both new and existing exporters.

In September, I launched a new Export Cluster initiative, which aims to bring businesses together in key sectors to develop their knowledge and understanding of exporting processes and opportunities. The Clusters are beginning to develop strong networks of support, working on a “one-to-many” basis to support their export development, and enabling businesses to share knowledge and experience and support each other to overcome barriers to exporting. I also recognise the importance of supporting non-exporting businesses to become exporters, therefore, in July, I launched a pilot New Exporter programme, through which we are working intensively with targeted businesses who have the ambition and potential to become sustainable and successful exporters.

Despite the restrictions on travel and events, we have continued to support Welsh businesses to access markets and find new overseas customers. We introduced a series of ‘virtual export market visits’ and have attended targeted trade exhibitions, working closely with our Welsh Government overseas offices and other in-market partners, including the Department for International Trade. Since we published the Plan, we have supported over 120 businesses to take part in overseas trade activities in key markets, including North America, Middle East, Asia and Europe.

I am also keen that we maximise our Welsh diaspora to create business links; for example, officials are working with Global Welsh to bolster our trade mission programme and I will be supporting the launch of Global Welsh Middle East, its latest hub, during the course of Dubai Expo 2020 in December. Our Envoys are also supporting overseas trade activity by providing advice and sharing market intelligence with businesses participating in overseas trade events. Going forward, we will continue to collectively promote and showcase the very best that Welsh industry has to offer on the global stage.

Despite the ongoing challenges, we remain determined to deliver export development and continue to work with and support our businesses to access the assistance they need. At the same time, we are engaging with the UK Government on wider trade policy issues and on the negotiation of new Free Trade Agreements. Any new Free Trade Agreement must reflect the needs of businesses in Wales, as well as the rest of the UK, and we will work with Welsh businesses to ensure they can make the most of the opportunities that trade deals can bring.

Wales achieves most when we work together as a team and we will continue to work in partnership with other organisations to develop and maximise the support available through the export ecosystem in Wales. We want to ensure that there is no ‘wrong door’ that businesses can open when they are looking for support. This means that, regardless of whether a business turns to the Welsh Government, our partners, the UK Government or another organisation, we will all be able to advise on the most appropriate course of action to achieve their exporting ambitions.