

## European And External Affairs Committee

Date: 25 March 2004  
Time: 09:00  
Venue: Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly Building, Cardiff Bay  
Title: Background information on the British Council and Wales

### Purpose

1. This paper, prepared for the European and International Affairs Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, outlines the role of the British Council in promoting Wales internationally. It provides a summary of the British Council's objectives, strategy and devolution policy, an outline of our directorate in Wales, and a brief account of key programmes involving Welsh partners and institutions.

### The British Council

2. The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for educational and cultural relations. Our purpose is to build mutually beneficial relationships between people in the UK and other countries, and to increase appreciation of the UK's creative ideas and achievements. Our work recognises the increasing interdependence of countries and the importance of contributing to, and learning from, mutually beneficial relationships. All our activity is focused on the achievement of three high level outcomes:

- improved perceptions of the UK in other countries
- enhanced greater mutual understanding between the UK and other countries
- stronger ties between the UK and other countries

3. We achieve these through programmes and services in education, English language teaching, the arts, science, governance and information, operating through a network of 227 offices and teaching centres in

110 countries.

4. Our current strategy, agreed with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, involves:

- a shift of resources from developed to transitional countries to fund increased activities in areas where the Council is able to achieve significant impact for the UK
- greater emphasis on targeting young people, especially future decision-makers and opinion-formers and reaching a wider, younger audience
- investment in the development of IT-based services and the use of digital technology to complement existing programmes
- using revenue-funded services, such as English language teaching, to enhance the Council's impact and achieve increased influence for the UK
- building strategic partnerships with other organisations which have similar objectives and whose activities complement those of the Council

5. We receive a grant-in-aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which in 2003-04 will amount to £164.2 million. However, we also earn income from teaching English, conducting British examinations and managing development and training contracts on behalf of the UK government, the European Union and other agencies. Our total turnover in 2004-05 is expected to total approximately £479 million.

## **Devolution policy**

6. The British Council is committed to representing the diversity of the UK overseas. We promote the UK as a whole and all its constituent parts. We recognise the importance of the major constitutional changes which have taken place in the UK since 1999, including devolution to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and take care to reflect these changes appropriately in our work. We also aim to ensure that target audiences overseas understand the origin, nature and effects of the reforms, and the sense of diversity which they embody.

7. Our offices in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast are responsible for maintaining links with the devolved administrations and have established close working relationships with partner organisations in each of the devolved UK countries. These partnerships typically involve the joint funding of programmes with shared objectives and, in some cases, jointly funded posts.

8. Our directorates in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland act as a conduit through which individuals

and institutions are able to access our extensive international network. They also provide information to HQ and overseas managers about the resources available from each of the devolved UK countries. Our criteria for selection of partners and activities include relevance to the British Council's overall strategy and quality.

9. Our work in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is supported by advisory committees comprising representatives from the devolved administrations and the key sectors in which we operate. The chairs of these committees represent the devolved UK countries on the British Council's Board on a rotational basis.

## **British Council Wales**

10. British Council Wales reflects the strategic objectives of the British Council as a whole by promoting, through our overseas offices, the particular and unique strengths of Wales in the areas of creativity and science, education and training, and governance. We do this in partnership with institutions and organisations in Wales.

11. British Council Wales remains sensitive to the needs and expectations of the Welsh Assembly Government and the National Assembly for Wales through the British Council/National Assembly All-Party Group which meets at least 3 times a year, and through the Wales Advisory Committee. We made submissions to the National Assembly's first Business Plan "Better Wales" and to the Welsh Assembly Government reviews of Arts and Culture, Higher Education, and the review of Welsh Language policy.

12. Since 1999, reflecting the increased priority attached to our work both in and with Wales following devolution, funding for British Council Wales has been increased and the staffing of our Cardiff office has been strengthened. We currently have a total of eight staff, including the Director, a Regional Manager responsible for British Council managed scholars at Welsh universities, and dedicated posts responsible for work in the arts, education and training, education promotion, and governance (at present vacant). We have a part-time member of staff in Bangor looking after student welfare in North and West Wales. Our office in Cardiff also hosts three Wales Arts International staff and we are in the process of recruiting a Communications Co-ordinator for our work in Wales. The annual budget for the Cardiff office, including staff, running and programme costs, is approximately £400,000.

### 13. Our strategic partners in Wales include:

- Arts Council of Wales, who co-operate with us in Wales Arts International, providing shared funding for posts and activities. Wales Arts International works to both promote the work of contemporary artists living and working in Wales and to help develop a thriving international agenda to the arts within Wales. At the root of this work is a commitment to exchange and collaboration, and the belief that cultural practice will best flourish through the development of sustainable long-term relationships. Wales Arts International current geographic priorities are:
  - Areas in Europe in which previous focus work has been based, eg., Baden-Württemberg.
  - The European Accession Countries and the EU Borderlands, particularly Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Croatia.
  - Québec
- Higher Education Funding Council of Wales, who, along with the British Council and representatives of the Higher Education Institutes in Wales, form the Wales International Consortium of Universities (WIC). WIC aims to attract more international students to Higher Education Institutions in Wales in line with the Assembly Government's strategic policy for HE: 'Reaching Higher' and complementing efforts to enhance the UK's share of the global market for international students. WIC enhances the individual international recruitment campaigns of its member institutions through increasing market intelligence to them, assisting with their marketing programmes and operating a pan-Wales clearing house system for international students applying to Welsh Institutions. There are plans to set up foundation courses in Wales and/or overseas which can attract international students to Welsh HEIs.
- Wales Tourist Board, who partner our relationship with British Council accredited English teaching centres in a project known as Learn English in Wales. The partnership aims to promote Wales as a place of study, tourism and leisure for international students wishing to improve their English language skills and to improve the quality of English language centres in Wales through encouraging membership of the British Council's accreditation schemes.
- Department for Training and Education, who fund a full-time post responsible for promoting international links between schools. This new post involves working from kindergarten schools to the Further Education sector in Wales; the underlying theme running through the work of the post is to increase awareness and the take up of European and international opportunities available to schools and institutions in Wales through the British Council. The post also co-operates closely with fforwm to enhance the training and experience of FE teachers, as well as increasing international students in FE institutions in Wales.
- Welsh Language Board, the British Council looks for opportunities to support activities of the Welsh Language Board which may be relevant to international organisations and agencies who wish to share and/or benefit from the Welsh experience in promoting bilingualism in education, employment and society.

#### 14. Examples of current joint funded projects include:

- With Welsh Assembly Government European and International Division and Wales Trade International British Council is planning a seminar for high flying environmental technologists from 8 European accession countries to take place in Wales in the Autumn of 2004.
- Welsh Assembly Government (Department for Training and Education): Since the creation of the new post in March 2003 British Council Wales has received education delegations from China, Hungary, Catalonia, and South Korea all expressing interest in linking with Wales as a priority country. There has also been an agreement signed between ESTYN and the National Centre for Public Exams in Hungary to assist in the development of a school inspection system, and between Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education and Swansea College to deliver English language training. Support for particular reciprocal links, for example, with New South Wales continues.
- Welsh Assembly Government (Ministry of Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language) – St David’s Day 2004 in Paris: a successful literary lunch was held in Paris as part of the St David’s Day celebrations with Welsh poets reading samples of their work and later meeting French counterparts for discussions on further links and collaboration. This event was organised in co-operation with British Council France and was attended by the Welsh Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language.
- DfTE - Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Development Agency and other private and public organisations in Wales: providing work attachments and experience for 18-25 Chevening Scholars each year at the end of their period of study. The National Assembly, in partnership with the British Council and Foreign and Commonwealth Office also hosts an annual reception for these scholars at the National Assembly Pierhead building.
- The National Assembly for Wales has also been involved in the British Council’s international MP/AM project on ‘Effective Women in Leadership’. MPs from Africa have visited Wales on work attachments to MPs and AMs to learn more about how women are able to contribute effectively to UK national and devolved country political decision making.
- Wales Arts International has invested extensively in website development ([www.wai.org.uk](http://www.wai.org.uk)). WAI has also produced a number of informative publications and directories as follows:
  - ‘Imaging Wales’ – a profile of 41 visual artists, produced to coincide with Wales’ first presence at the Venice Biennale of Art
  - ‘Platform un/1’ – the first in a short series of publications exploring contemporary performance practice in Wales
  - ‘Form’ – a profile of 48 craft and applied arts makers
  - A publication on Welsh literature in collaboration with ‘Welsh Literature Abroad’ (Aberystwyth) is to appear shortly.
- Welsh Language Board: British Council Wales is supporting a 3 year project financed by the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Language Board to investigate and monitor bilingual teaching in the New Brunswick province of Canada with the aim of exchanging experience between Canada and Wales in the sector of bilingual education.
- Welsh Books Council: a joint British Council/Welsh Books Council project over 3 years

promotes Welsh books to all British Council offices overseas accompanied by a CD rom of all Welsh Books Council publications. For the first time in 2004 we are offering, in collaboration with Academi, a visit by a Welsh writer to the country that orders the most Welsh books.

- Welsh Language Project in Chubut Province, Patagonia, now in its seventh year, has strengthened the Welsh identity of the diaspora communities in Chubut and promoted the use of the Welsh language as a vehicle of communication in those communities.
- Techniquet: British Council Wales and overseas offices have supported exhibitions, training and the manufacture of interactive apparatus in countries as diverse as Australia, China, South Africa and Brazil. The current Brazil project, due to last until 2005, aims to extend the use of science centres in Brazil as part of that country's science curriculum.

15. A full-time governance post is at present under recruitment for the Cardiff office in recognition of the important contribution Welsh governance experience can make to the British Council's work in devolution. The post will focus on particular strengths and innovations of the National Assembly for Wales (eg sustainable development, equal opportunities, children's rights) as well as Welsh strengths in the media (as an agency of the democratic process) and the law. Cultural and social diversity in Wales will also figure as a source of possible debates, exhibitions or consultancy visits overseas.

16. Recent activities in governance have included:

- A seminar on Social Inclusion and the Information Society (opened by the Minister for Economic Development and Transport) in January 2004 focussing on the widening of access to computer assisted technology to include disadvantaged and minority social groups.
- A major international forum on bridging the gap between asylum seekers and their host communities 'A Sense of Place' was held in Cardiff in November 2003. The seminar attracted international participation from more than 27 overseas countries which included public sector decision makers, journalists and artists. The seminar was opened by the Director General of the British Council with a letter of welcome from the First Minister.
- The British Council continues to support the annual seminar at Atlantic College which attracts 150 young people from primarily Muslim countries and 150 British youngsters. They meet to discuss current issues as well as to receive training on leadership, fund raising and lobbying techniques.
- Mention has already been made in paragraph 13 of the 'Effective Women Leaders' project. MPs from Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya have visited Wales and return visits are now planned for later in the year to those countries. Julie Morgan MP was the Welsh MP who exchanged with Ethiopia. Jane Hutt AM (Minister for Health and Social Services) and Helen Mary Jones AM met with their counterparts from Kenya and Uganda respectively. Rosemary Butler, Chair of the British Council/National Assembly All Party Group is at present hoping to form a group of

Welsh AMs to give new directions to this programme towards links with countries particularly the new European enlargement area.

## 17. Future plans

- Wales has established a pilot ‘Lecturers International Development Programme’ for FE colleges. This programme sends FE college lecturers on international professional development programmes and is in a pilot phase (4 projects) until April 2004. If successful the pilot programme will then be expanded to include up to 15 lecturers taking part in international exchanges each year.
- Discussions are at present being held with the Department for Training and Education, Welsh HEIs, Techniquet and Scientific Advisor to the National Assembly as well as with British Council Wales on development of a Welsh Scientific Society and an international arm (‘Wales Science International’) to promote science and research activities in Wales overseas through British Council programmes.
- The Wales International Consortium (see paragraph 13 above) is negotiating with the English Language Institute in Beijing and a secondary school in China to establish a Wales International Foundation course in China. It is hoped to attract a number of Chinese students to Wales following a course of study in China over a period of 1 year which prepares them in study skills, English language and core subjects in order to attend under-graduate programmes at Welsh universities. The first intake to this course will be in September 2004 providing potential international students for Wales the following year.
- A mission to Beirut to assess the feasibility of a creative industries partnership between Wales and Lebanon has just returned to Wales. Initial indications are that the visit was a fruitful one for both sides and that links already established between Welsh and Lebanese libraries might be extended to other sectors.
- Following a visit by the Slovenia Minister of Culture to Wales in 2003 a programme of exchange visits and projects has been initiated by WAI and British Council Slovenia. Two Welsh architects recently visited Ljubljana for discussion on buildings conservation. Other activities including a Wales Tourist poster exhibition and two Welsh films are to follow later in the year.