

WIR 07

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol |
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee
Cysylltiadau rhwng Cymru ac Iwerddon | Wales-Ireland relations

Ymateb gan: Conswl Cyffredinol Iwerddon | Response from: Consulate General of Ireland

1. The Consulate General of Ireland is very pleased that the Senedd's Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee has decided to undertake an inquiry into Wales-Ireland relations. The engagement of elected representatives adds further depth and breadth to the close relationship that exists between our two Governments. The observations that follow are submitted in response to the Committee's consultation and invitation to make written submissions.

Broader context of Wales-Ireland Relations

2. Ireland and Wales are the closest of neighbours, and we have a strong and positive relationship built on age-old connections and a deep cultural understanding. Our modern and vibrant relationship has grown from historic links, common heritage and culture, and close people-to-people, business, cultural and sporting connections.
3. The re-establishment of the Consulate-General of Ireland in 2019 was a reaffirmation of Ireland's commitment to deepen and strengthen this naturally warm and close relationship between Ireland and Wales. It was part of Ireland's ambitious Global Ireland programme, which aims to double Ireland's impact around the world by 2025, as well as demonstrating Ireland's commitment to strengthening the British Irish relationship following the UK's departure from the EU. It also forms part of a wider programme of investment in Ireland's footprint in Great Britain in recent years, including an enhanced whole-of-Government presence in London, the opening of the Consulate General for the North of England in 2021, and the establishment of an Enterprise Ireland Office in Manchester in 2019.
4. The UK's departure from the EU has already brought change and it will undoubtedly alter and reshape the Ireland-Wales relationship in the coming years. Joint participation in EU programmes has been a positive force for the relationship between Ireland and Wales. Over the last twenty-five years, the Ireland Wales programme has fostered the creation of uniquely strong and focused connections across the Irish Sea at local and sectoral levels. Ireland and Wales are committed to working together to sustain the networks which have emerged through this programme.
5. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. In addition to celebrating what was a transformative moment for everyone on the island of Ireland, it is timely to recall the importance of Strand Three of that agreement for the East-West institutional relationship. Wales and Ireland continue to work side-by-side in the framework of the British-Irish Council and our parliamentarians meet regularly through the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. All three strands of the Agreement are vitally important and they are designed to be mutually reinforcing. We want to see each of them working to their full capacity to deliver for all of the people across these islands.

The Ireland-Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan (2021-2025)

6. The Ireland-Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan 2021-2025 is a key pillar in our bilateral relationship and sets out our commitment to deepening cooperation. It was launched by then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney TD and First Minister Mark Drakeford MS in March 2021. It was the first time that Ireland and Wales published a joint document of this nature.
7. The Joint Action Plan includes forty-five actions across six areas of cooperation for which the Welsh Government has devolved responsibility, namely: political and official engagement; climate action and sustainability; trade and tourism; education and research; culture, language and heritage; and communities, diaspora and sport. Delivery has been led by the Consulate General of Ireland in Cardiff and the Welsh Government Office in Dublin.
8. Delivery of the Joint Action Plan is reviewed annually at ministerial level. To date, implementation has been strong and dynamic. As of late 2022, almost 80% of the commitments made have been either fully completed (10%) or well advanced (70%). Early progress has been made on the remaining 20% of actions.
9. One of its key actions is a commitment to hold an annual Ireland Wales Forum to bring together political, economic and broader stakeholders to build relationships, to reflect on ongoing collaboration and to identify opportunities for further cooperation. The inaugural Forum took place in Cardiff in October 2021 and was an excellent platform to exchange policy perspectives, share learning and build collaboration to strengthen the Ireland-Wales relationship, in particular in the areas of sustainability and green recovery, trade promotion, economic development, climate action and energy policy.
10. The second Ireland-Wales Forum in Dublin and Cork was in October 2022. Chaired jointly by then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney TD and First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS, it involved bilateral meetings as well as a wider roundtable, and included a visit to the National Museum, Collins Barracks, to learn more about the partnership between the National Museums of Ireland and Wales. Discussions focused on bilateral relations, trade cooperation and economic development, and renewable energy. Political discussions were informed by practical engagement with key stakeholders. Participating ministers visited MaREI, the Science Foundation Ireland Centre for Energy Climate and the Marine, where they participated in a roundtable discussion convened by Cork Chamber with companies working on renewable energy.
11. Ireland looks forward to the third annual Ireland-Wales Forum which will take place later this year in Wales. Irish and Welsh officials will work in close cooperation to agree the Forum's programme and agenda.
12. Demonstrating the strong progress and collaborative approach to date, other positive outcomes of the Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan include:
 - High-level meetings between then Taoiseach Micheál Martin and the First Minister at British Irish Council Summits, as well as their joint participation in an Enterprise Ireland trade event in Cardiff in 2021.

- Meetings between the then Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar and Economy Minister, Vaughan Gething; between Higher Education Minister, Simon Harris and Education Minister Jeremy Miles; and between Minister for Disabilities, Equality, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman and Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt.
- A visit to Cardiff by Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, Minister of State at the Department of Finance with special responsibility for Financial Services, Credit Unions and Insurance is planned for St. Patrick’s Day 2023.
- Commencement of an 11-month secondment of Welsh Government official to the Irish Abroad Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs from May 2022 to build shared learning on diaspora affairs;
- New language legislation in Ireland Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 informed by Welsh approach to language policy;
- Irish Sea Symposium organised by Welsh Government with participation from Irish officials and ongoing engagement with INTERREG partners;
- Inaugural ‘St David’ lecture, the Dewi Padraig Dialogue, on approaches to language policy in Dublin City University in May 2022;
- Excellent ongoing collaboration between Coláiste Lurgan and Urdd Gobaith Cymru;
- Visit of the Irish naval vessel LÉ Róisín to Cardiff in July 2022 celebrating strong bilateral ties and maritime connections;
- Continued engagement with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, including a visit by Future Generations Commissioner Sophie Howe to Dublin in October 2022.
- Successful partnerships between the Welsh Government and cultural organisations in Ireland to foster cultural connections, including support of the collaboration between the National Museums of Ireland and Wales.

Opportunities in developing parliamentary relations between the Senedd and Oireachtas

13. The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) provides a forum for regular engagement between the Senedd and the Oireachtas. The Consul General of Ireland was very pleased to have the opportunity to meet the Senedd’s BIBA Members before its plenary in Farnham, Cavan in October 2022. As then Taoiseach, Micheál Martin noted at the opening of the plenary, the engagement of parliamentarians helps “build understanding, develop common objectives and, crucially, build relationships that will endure into the future – supporting renewed and positive British-Irish relations.”
14. Closer cooperation between the Senedd and the Oireachtas can only make a positive contribution to Ireland-Wales relations. As set out in the Joint Action Plan, we are committed to supporting the Senedd and the Oireachtas to explore opportunities for exchanges on shared challenges. The Consulate General of Ireland will continue to engage with Members of the Senedd with this in mind and stands ready to support efforts for closer parliamentary relations.

Concluding Observations

15. Ireland and Wales have always enjoyed a strong and warm bilateral relationship. Our intertwined history can be traced all the way back to myths and legends. It is expressed in our Celtic heritage and languages and by our people who have moved freely between our two countries and continue to do so for reasons of family, education, work and sport. We

continue to have strong economic and trade links. In our bilateral relations with Wales, Ireland's goal is to ensure that we remain close neighbours and friends.

Consulate General of Ireland, Cardiff, February 2023