

WIR08

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: CALIN | Response from: CALIN

Inquiry into Wales-Ireland relations

Wales-Ireland relations post-Brexit

CALIN is an INTERREG-funded programme that launched in 2017 through a collaboration between six universities across Ireland and Wales. Together, CALIN partners have developed a strong relationship and worked together to build a network that is driving innovation in over 190 SMEs. The solid foundations and strength of the network has enabled CALIN to continue to grow and work collaboratively with little disruption post-Brexit notwithstanding the impact of Covid-19 on some research activity.

Current activity within CALIN is supported by the INTERREG programme which is due to end in August this year. There is clear motivation from CALIN partners and stakeholders to continue to collaborate beyond this date with an ambition to work under a similar mechanism moving forward. However, with no direct replacement for INTERREG funding, a significant risk of a post-funding hiatus exists if a CALIN bridge isn't maintained between Ireland and Wales. As such, the CALIN team have been proactively engaging with both Welsh and Irish governments to develop a sustainable route forward. A route that would allow CALIN partners and stakeholders to continue to drive life science innovation in Irish and Welsh SMEs both within and beyond the limits of the INTERREG regions.

Current approach to bilateral engagement between the Welsh and Irish governments and whether it is fit for purpose post-Brexit

Since the official opening of the Ireland's Consulate General in Wales in 2021, the CALIN team have engaged directly with both the previous and current Irish Consul and have recently met with the Irish ambassador to the UK to discuss the CALIN programme. The CALIN team are also actively engaged with the Welsh Government office in Ireland. Through this engagement CALIN directors were invited to participate in Government-lead workshops (Irish Sea Symposium series) providing the opportunity for Government officials to hear directly from those involved in the field. We see this as an effective approach to bilateral engagement and would like to see this further developed through future opportunities to present successful bilateral activities to ministers and engage with parliament.

The [Ireland-Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan \(2021-2025\)](#) as an approach to international engagement

The [Ireland-Wales shared statement and joint action plan 2021 to 2025](#) highlights CALIN in delivery industrial collaboration in the Irish and Welsh life-sciences industries. CALIN is leading the Health & Life Science Innovation theme in determining proactive strategies for taking

forward a new phase of future cooperation across the Irish and Celtic seas at the request of the Welsh government. As such, on 28th February 2023, CALIN hosted an Ireland-Wales event that gave stakeholders the opportunity to voice their thoughts on the future approach to international engagement. Discussion within the meeting echoed the statements made within the action plan and further highlighted how important, yet how rare it is for HEIs to have a group of researchers already in place and able to support industry on demand, without the need for prolonged funding applications. It was agreed that this has underpinned an innovation pipeline that has helped to sustain and grow the local life science SME community in Ireland and Wales.

The funding of future cooperation and collaborative projects between Ireland and Wales

For over 6 years CALIN has been enabling world-leading HEI's expertise to deliver economic benefit for SMEs in the Life Science sector. CALIN has united HEIs, SMEs and health and social care services to provide a strong, dynamic cross-border and inter-disciplinary knowledge base that supports economic and scientific Life Science developments in Ireland and Wales. By closely linking R&D, innovation, commercial development, and the provision of high-value jobs, CALIN's smart specialisation approach has established a platform for industry-driven research, development and innovation to promote value creation and strengthen the Life Science sector, an essential generator of wealth and prosperity in the regions.

However, with no direct replacement for INTERREG funding, the CALIN team are actively seeking new opportunities to ensure the continuation of this well-established network. CALIN has considered several opportunities such as engaging with PEACEPLUS and driving investment from large industry stakeholders. Investment by large companies into Wales is a challenge but Ireland have attracted this kind of investment from large industries such as ICON in Dublin. CALIN allows stakeholders in Wales to access these larger companies in Ireland and this will be a key part of CALIN's future.

Furthermore, CALIN is aware of potential opportunities with future joint UKRI-SFI Co-Centre Programmes. The Co-Centre Programme has been established as a new strategic collaborative partnership between Ireland, Great Britain and Northern Ireland, co-funded by industry, to consolidate research activities across higher education institutes in co-hosted centres. The Co-Centre model is essentially an extension of the CALIN model that CALIN partners, where new partners in Northern Ireland (and possibly North West England and Scotland) would join the existing network to further strengthen the research base and offering to industry in driving innovation. The first Co-Centre call has been launched (<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/co-centre-programme-2022-collaboration-for-transformative-research-and-innovation/>) and CALIN partners understand that there may be a future Co-Centre call in the health area to which they are ideally placed to respond, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss CALIN and relevant Co-Centre opportunities with UKRI.

However, with the CALIN programme due to end in August this year, there is a clear need for bridging funding ideally from both Welsh and Irish governments ahead of the development of future centres and through which CALIN would host a virtual office to maintain continuity as we move forward to next phase.

Priority areas for cooperation between Ireland and Wales

The Ireland Wales workshop recently held by CALIN allowed stakeholders to suggest key areas of important economic and scientific growth within the Life Science sector that should be prioritised for future cooperation between Ireland and Wales sector. The key areas identified were: Advanced therapeutics; diagnostics (including precision medicine and genomics); Regenerative medicine; Population-level research; Systems approaches (digital health, big data & AI); Preventative medicine (including healthy ageing) and One Health.