

European and External Affairs Committee

Date:	28 February 2007
Time:	09.30 – 12.30
Venue:	Committee Room 3, Senedd, Cardiff Bay
Title:	European and External Affairs – Report to the Assembly for 2006-2007

Rerprt to the Assembly for 2006-2007

Introduction

1. This report covers the period from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.

Membership

2. During the year membership was:

Nicholas Bourne AM	Ieuan Wyn Jones AM
Rosemary Butler AM	Sandy Mewies AM (Chair)
Jeff Cuthbert AM	Jonathan Morgan AM
Michael German AM	Rhodri Morgan AM (First Minister)
Christine Gwyther AM	Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM

Meetings

3. During the reporting period, the Committee held nine formal public meetings in Cardiff.

Remit and Responsibilities

4. The statutory basis for the European and External Affairs Committee is set out in Standing Order 15.9.

5. The Committee's remit is to keep under review:

- The Assembly's relations with the regions, other nations and institutions of the European Union, and its methods for informing and advising those institutions of the needs of Wales.
- The Assembly's liaison arrangements with UKREP, and with United Kingdom government departments on European issues.
- The Assembly's methods and procedures for the consideration of documents, issues and questions emanating from European institutions, having particular regard to the need for liaison with Members of Parliament responsible for scrutiny of European matters of particular relevance to Wales.
- The Assembly's relations with regions and nations external to the European Union and the Assembly's involvement in European and international organisations.

6. To facilitate the exchange of information between Assembly members and Welsh representatives in the various European institutions, Standing Orders allow the participation at the Committee's meetings of Welsh Members of the European Parliament and Welsh representatives of the Committee of the Regions. The Committee has extended this invitation to Welsh representatives on the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) and the European Commission Representation in Wales.

Summary of Committee Activities

7. The Committee has focused on issues relating to the European Union but we recognised that our remit extended wider than this, and we aimed to maintain a proper balance in our work programme. The following summary is not exhaustive but paints a picture of our work during the reporting period.

European and Global Citizenship Education

8. In May, the Committee started taking evidence for its policy review: European and Global Citizenship Education. The Committee invited various organisations and individuals to share their views on the subject, including the European Commission Office in Wales; Council for Education in World Citizenship (CEWC) Cymru; the Director of Welsh Baccalaureate, WJEC; Welsh Council for Voluntary Action; Oxfam Cymru; South Wales Direct Education Centre and Nicky Griffiths, a student at Bangor University who had studied the Welsh Baccalaureate, including a period of work experience in Brussels as an assistant to Jill Evans MEP. A period of consultation allowed responses to be gathered from all over Wales. For the first time, the Committee used a web based consultation directed at young people in addition to a written consultation. It is intended to publish a report of this inquiry in March. The Committee has also discussed the matter of education in the European context with Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

European Union Convergence and Competitiveness Funding

9. In September, the Committee considered an update from the Welsh European Funding Office on the Operational Plan for Convergence Funding. Assembly Government Officials reported on the 2007 - 2013 Structural Funds Convergence Programmes Consultation Document after which a response was sent to the First Minister which reflected the views of the Committee. The Committee also scrutinised Competitiveness Funding and Convergence Funding at its January meeting in order to ensure the best possible use of European funding in Wales.

Make Poverty History Campaign

10. The Committee received an update in April on the progress made since the Make Poverty History Campaign from Oxfam Cymru, Christian Aid and Welsh International Sector Networks. The Committee discussed ways of encouraging Local Authorities, Businesses and individuals in Wales to use Fair Trade products and ethical procurement processes as a matter of course.

Regional Aid Map

11. The on-going negotiations concerning the Regional Aid Map were closely monitored by the Committee throughout the year. The Committee received updates via the First Minister's Report and engaged in discussions before the Map came into force on 1 January 2007.

EU Communication Policy

12. The Committee responded to the European Commission's Communications Strategy White Paper in June. The Committee considered the coverage of European issues by the media in Wales. Discussions were held with three of the five Welsh Europe Direct Centres to explore current activity and future plans for promotion of information on European issues. This also formed part of the evidence for our citizenship inquiry referred to above. In November, the Committee discussed ways of communicating European issues to Wales with Reijo Kemppinen, Head of the European Commission Representation the UK.

13. The Committee considered the Welsh Assembly Government external relations strategy document 'Wales and the World'; and recommended that this strategy should be reviewed annually.

14. The Committee continued to receive regular updates from Members of the Committee of the Regions (CoR). Rosemary Butler AM and Janet Davies AM have provided oral reports on CoR activities at every meeting.

15. The Committee received regular updates from the First Minister and his officials on Welsh Assembly Government activities relevant to the Committee's remit. The First Minister provided a written report at every meeting, on which he was questioned by Members. This report was supplemented by oral progress reports and 'papers to note', when necessary.

Relations with EU Institutions

16. In order to develop relationships with Members of the European Parliament, the Committee has held discussions via video link with Eluned Morgan MEP and Jill Evans MEP. This was the first time that the Committee has held discussions in this way and Committee Members and MEP's felt it had been very successful. The Committee has obtained agreement, in principle, from Jonathan Evans MEP and Glenys Kinnock MEP for future discussions, via video link, but this will be a matter for our successor Committee to follow up.

17. His Excellency Jaakko Laajava, the Finnish Ambassador to the UK, addressed the Committee in October. He outlined the progress made in achieving Finland's objectives for the European Union Presidency after which there was an opportunity for Members' questions.

18. The Committee took part in the second test phase of the subsidiarity monitoring network, arranged by the Committee of the Regions. The CoR is keen to facilitate the better application of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles within the EU. The Committee submitted its views on the subsidiarity and proportionality implications of selected legislative proposals in the field of education and lifelong learning. The network helps to strengthen ties between the European Union institutions and local and regional authorities. The CoR will publish a report of this test project during the spring.

19. At its final meeting, the Committee took part in a discussion, via video link, with European Commissioner (and Vice President) Margot Wallström on her responsibilities for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy. This was most informative. [Note: amend in light of actual discussion.]

20. At this meeting, the Committee was also pleased to welcome His Excellency Robert Holmes Tuttle, the Ambassador of the United States of America to the Court of St James's. The Ambassador addresses the Committee and then held a brief discussion. [Note: amend in light of actual discussion.]

Legacy for Third Assembly

21. Also at its final meeting, the Committee agreed a legacy paper; suggesting possible issues for consideration by successor Committee(s) in the Third Assembly.

Sandy Mewies AM
Committee Chair