

Committee Members

Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee
Senedd Cymru

By-email SeneddCulture@senedd.wales

23 February 2023

Dear Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experience as part of your inquiry. Most relevantly, we can comment on current collaborations with institutions and governmental organisations in the Republic of Ireland post-Brexit as an aspect of Wales-Ireland relations during this era.

Aberystwyth University is engaged with a variety of partners in the Republic of Ireland on a wide range of projects associated with mainly research projects, and also with a limited number of teaching partnerships.

Many partnerships focus on our common interests. These are often focussed on geographic or cultural matters or centred on shared challenges.

Prior to Brexit, relevant research was highly productive and innovative. Most of the ongoing research projects that involve collaboration with partners in Ireland were established pre-Brexit or immediately post. In contrast, the post-Brexit period so far has been marked by uncertainty and many projects face a cliff edge in funding.

We continue to collaborate in a variety of ways with partners in Ireland. Some relevant examples are outlined below.

Academic colleagues in the Department of Welsh and Celtic Studies collaborate with counterparts in higher education institutions across the Republic. Under current circumstances it is not possible to include colleagues in Ireland in some UKRI funding bids, which means that there is a reliance on their voluntarily contributions to projects. This has hampered some collaborations. Welsh and Celtic Studies would benefit from a Welsh-Irish Government funding stream for research projects that foster collaboration between institutions in the two countries.

Aberystwyth University's Institute of Biological Environmental and Rural Studies (IBERS) is part of an INTERREG collaboration called ValuSect that is focussed on research on insects as

resources for the development of food products. This collaboration also includes the Agriculture and Food Development Authority in Ireland. The work in the UK has faced some delay post Brexit as relevant and necessary regulations were needed in place of EU-wide laws that no longer covered the UK. New practical challenges have also arisen following Brexit such as couriers no longer picking up from us to go directly to Ireland.

Aberystwyth University's Department of Geography and Earth Sciences collaborates with partners on both sides of the Celtic Sea on a number of tourism/heritage Ireland-Wales projects. These include the CHERISH project that has sought to increase knowledge and raise awareness of climate change risks for the cultural heritage of headlands, islands and reefs along the coast of both countries. Another project named 'Coastal Uplands: Heritage and Tourism (CUPHAT)' aims to increase sustainable forms of tourism within four coastal upland areas of Ireland and Wales, thus leading to the creation of more sustainable livelihoods, communities and environments. The 'Ports, Past and Present' project explores the history and cultural heritage of ports that connect Wales and Ireland, aiming to increase visitor numbers and enhance tourist experiences in the relevant communities, as well as raise awareness about their importance to future economic growth. With funding for these projects now drawing to an end, post-Brexit there is currently little prospect of continuation.

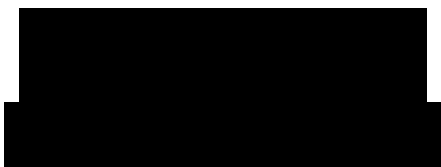
However, post Brexit, academics at Aberystwyth University are still working hard to maintain relevant links. While there were less barriers to collaborating within the EU when the UK was a member-state, and EU funding streams were available, it is still possible to establish projects with partners within the EU, just as we seek to do with partners across the globe. Some examples of this are as follows:

The Department of Welsh and Celtic Studies has received a teaching grant from the Irish Government's Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media since 2006 for teaching Modern Irish beyond Ireland. The funding works on a three-year cycle and the current round is 2022-25, representing a continuation of a collaboration established prior to Brexit. The grant subsidises a lectureship in the Department. Since 2019 -20 the grant also provides Irish Language Scholarships for Aberystwyth students to study language courses in the Gaeltacht, thus providing a much-appreciated enrichment activity for Aberystwyth students. We report annually on teaching and enrichment activities to the Department of TCAGS&M. Colleagues at our Institute for Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences are collaborating with Irish institutions on projects to produce high energy agricultural feed and biomass and recovering nitrogen and phosphorus from dairy waste; and improving and building resilience in oats to benefit the Irish and Welsh economies.

These projects are examples of our ongoing efforts to engage with institutions and governmental organisations in Ireland as our research responds to common challenges. Regarding the funding of future cooperation and collaborative projects between Ireland and Wales, we have been party to limited relevant discussion. While these have not yet come to fruition, it would seem clear that there is significant scope for wider collaboration. The British-Irish Chambers of Commerce, and especially its Research Committee (of which our Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange is a member) has discussed future mechanisms for collaboration extensively. Although there is a widespread recognition of the value of links, and a desire to maintain and extend them, there is equally disappointment that little progress has been made in ensuring such links continue post-Brexit.

Without doubt the breadth of recent partnership work, along with the range of expertise developed here in Wales in relevant academic areas, is evidence of the potential for further mutually beneficial work in the future. In realising this potential, we can not only make important progress through research, but can also mitigate against any possible weakening of links between institutions and communities in the post-Brexit era.

Your sincerely,



Yr Athro/Professor Elizabeth Treasure