

Mark Drakeford MS
First Minister
Welsh Government

Re: Ministerial evidence session follow-up

Dear Mark,

Thank you for attending the Committee on Wednesday, 10 May 2023 for the evidence session on our inquiry into Wales-Ireland relations, and for your letter of 24 May 2023 providing further information. During the meeting, we agreed to follow up on a number of matters, which I have outlined below.

Budget allocation

The Committee would be grateful to receive information on the budget allocation for work related directly to implementation of the Wales-Ireland Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan (the Shared Statement).

Knowledge sharing

During the meeting, we discussed the exchange of knowledge and ideas through secondment opportunities. Alun Davies MS explained that, during the Committee's recent visit to Dublin, Committee Members met the Welsh Government's secondee at Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs. You explained that the secondee was due to provide a full report on their experience to capture the lessons learned and support an evaluation of the effectiveness of the initiative. The Committee would be grateful to receive a copy of that report when it is available.

PEACE PLUS

The Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee has drawn to our attention an international financing agreement for the continuation of the PEACE PLUS programme. The programme will continue to jointly fund cross-border activities that promote peace and reconciliation and contribute to cross-border economic and territorial development of the Northern Ireland-Ireland border region post-Brexit. The Committee would be grateful to receive the Welsh Government's view on the contribution of the programme to Wales-Ireland relations.

Wales-Ireland relations framework

The Committee notes that the Welsh Government has a number of initiatives and strategies for Wales-Ireland relations including its International Strategy, the Shared Statement, and its new Irish Sea Framework. Please can you explain how these initiatives work together and how Ministers co-ordinate them within the Welsh Government. It would also be helpful for the Committee to know whether there are any plans to bring all your Wales-Ireland initiatives together in one place in the future.

Wales-Ireland co-operation post Brexit

You told us in your written evidence that, "...officials continue to work together to ensure the successes gained through the Ireland-Wales Programme are not lost." Please can you explain the steps that Welsh Government is taking to ensure that this happens.

Horizon Europe

During the meeting we discussed access to Horizon Europe following the announcement of the Windsor Framework. You told us that association to Horizon Europe will not happen, "...in the near-term." The Committee are keen to know when the Welsh Government thinks that access to Horizon Europe will happen.

Shared statement and joint action plan

During our inquiry, we have found that awareness amongst stakeholders of the Shared Statement ranges from excellent to poor. Please advise what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the stakeholders referenced in the Shared Statement are aware of your commitments to support their cross-border work.

Bilateral relations between the Welsh and Irish Governments

The Members are keen to know more about your role at the British-Irish Council, and to understand whether and how this has changed since Brexit.

Cooperation beyond 2025

We heard during our recent visit to Dublin about plans to refresh the Shared Statement. In your written evidence to this inquiry, you set out key areas for inclusion in future shared statements with Ireland, such as educational links, funding, economic links, political cooperation, and policy sharing. The Committee would welcome an update on the progress of this work and would like to understand how Welsh stakeholders and Members will be engaged in the development of any refreshed Wales-Ireland plan.

In your overseas offices report, you note that you are about to sign a shared statement with Germany. Could you confirm that this is separate and additional to the Memorandum of Understanding with Baden-Württemberg we discussed during the international relations scrutiny session? Could you also explain why Germany was selected, and whether the framework for Wales-Ireland relations we discussed during the meeting will be used as a blueprint for this new shared statement.

We look forward to receiving your response in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS

Committee Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.
We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.