

Supporting Shared Learning – Ireland and Wales

October 2023

Introduction

This note is to inform Ministers on the experience and lessons learned from the secondment of a Welsh Government official to the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, which arose from a commitment in the [Ireland-Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan 2021-25](#).

The secondment was designed to promote shared learning between the two administrations, in this case in the area of diaspora policy. Such shared learning helps to foster cooperation and collaboration, through sharing experience, approaches and skills in areas of common interest.

At the 2022 Forum in Cork, Ministers discussed opportunities to build on the success of the initial secondment and to introduce more formal policy exchange on a regular basis. Following scoping since completion of the secondment, plans to facilitate more regular policy exchange in priority areas are set out below.

Diaspora Secondment 2022-2023 – Summary Overview

Recognising the importance of diaspora communities globally for both the Ireland and Wales, the [Ireland-Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan 2021-25](#), included a commitment to facilitate a secondment from the Welsh Government to the Government of Ireland in order to '*intensify our exchange of knowledge and expertise in both direct and indirect diaspora engagement*'.

Following an internal competition, Welsh Government undertook a one year secondment to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) between May 2022 and May 2023. An extensive report on the work undertaken during the secondment period has been prepared.

In summary, the secondment facilitated the officer to gain first-hand experience of the breadth of Irish diaspora policy; to work directly on administering grant schemes to support Irish communities globally, and to gain clear insights on how supports and outreach to communities abroad have – and continue - to evolve to meet the changing needs of the Irish diaspora.

Key Learning from Secondment Period and Future Learning Framework

Critically, the year-long secondment gave the Welsh officer direct insight into the different historical and cultural factors impacting on Irish and Welsh diaspora communities abroad. This will be of particular value in considering which aspects of Irish diaspora policy and support may be most applicable to the Welsh government approach into the future.

Importantly, the secondment also facilitated an increasing range of contacts between Irish and Welsh officials. This is vital in supporting implementation of the wider Shared Statement. That increased engagement included ensuring official level consultations on diaspora policy, as well as active engagement by Welsh government officials in the Global Irish Civic Forum in Dublin Castle in 2023. On a more social level, the Welsh secondee played a key role in organising a group visit of young diplomats from Ireland to Wales to the *Other Voices* festival in Cardigan – a key strategic partnership under the Shared Statement, showcasing Irish and Welsh music, language and ideas.

Based on the lessons learnt from the secondment period, officials have worked in recent months to identify how best to build on this shared learning approach. Specifically, the Ireland Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan commits to direct official level co-operation across a range of policy areas, reinforcing collaboration and exchange across social, cultural, education and economic spheres at all levels.

Building on this and in view of the focus championed by Ministers at Ireland Wales For over the last two years, it is proposed that shared Ireland Wales learning over the coming year will be undertaken in a number of specific policy areas. Specifically, this will include a focus on: renewable energy; education and green skills development; culture to include exploration of support schemes for arts practitioners; language-related policy; and facilitating trade and investment linkages.

This learning will be undertaken in a variety of different ways, to include regular Ministerial engagement; the facilitation of official level consultations; and the organisation of joint site or study visits, including with relevant business partners. A report will be prepared for the Ireland Wales Forum 2024 on progress to this end.

October 2023

ENDS