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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Chair
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport,
and International Relations Committee
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20 June 2024

Dear Chair

Thank you for your letter of 22 May regarding the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee we attended on 15th May.

Please find attached a response to the questions in the Annex.

Yours sincerely,

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Annex

Details of inter-governmental meetings and meetings between officials where Welsh Government Priorities for the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) have been raised and what was discussed.

Matters related to the TCA are covered formally in the Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) on UK-EU Relations. This has met six times since its inaugural meeting in February 2022, most recently on 6 March 2024. We publish Written Statements following these meetings which set out the key issues discussed, but these are not minutes and cannot cover the entirety of discussions. Some issues are also discussed in other IMG meetings, such as the IMG for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

There is a good deal of preparatory work for IMG meetings undertaken between officials of the four Governments. The FCDO holds fortnightly official-level meetings with the Devolved Governments to look at the range of EU-related issues, including the TCA. These also play a role in preparing for IMG UK-EU Relations meetings and high-level UK-EU meetings, such as the Partnership Council and Trade Specialised Committees. Specific ad hoc official-level meetings between UK Government and the Devolved Governments have also been held to prepare for those UK-EU meetings. These meetings have included discussion of Devolved Governments' and UK Government priorities which the UK Government has then been able to incorporate into UK positions and take to the subsequent meeting with the EU. Official-level meetings between lead UK Government departments and the Devolved Governments are also held to prepare for other UK-EU meetings, such as the Specialised Committees, under the TCA.

Published minutes of meetings of the Partnership Council, Trade Partnership Committee and the Trade Specialised Committee on Services illustrate Welsh Government priorities have been raised through these mechanisms by the UK Government, including our ongoing concern about visas for touring artists.

Welsh Government priorities for supporting the cultural sector post-Brexit, and difference with other parts of the UK

The Culture and Creative Industries Inter-Ministerial Group on 2 May was a productive meeting. It was useful to better understand some of the nation specific priorities of Ministers attending and to ensure the UK Secretary of State appreciates the importance of representing all four nations in international discussions, including with the EU. Everyone present recognised the current funding pressures and financial challenges our cultural and creative sectors are experiencing. Issues arising from leaving the EU, such as the impact of visa and border control arrangements and lack of access to Creative Europe, contribute to these challenges in Wales and across the UK.

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice launched a consultation on the Welsh Government's Draft Priorities for Culture in Wales¹ on 23 May, running until 4 September. The new Priorities set out our vision for the arts, museums, libraries, archives and historic environment sectors for the next five years. Development of the Priorities has been inclusive and values-led. Unique to Wales, this work has been informed from the outset by our Well-being of Future Generations Act, which puts cultural well-being at the heart of sustainable development in Wales and includes a specific goal to achieve 'A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language'. The consultation period offers a key opportunity for everyone with an interest to provide their opinions and we will consider every response.

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/draft-priorities-culture-wales-2024-2030>

Despite the difficult financial backdrop, we are excited about the Priorities - there's a real sense of drawing things together and of highlighting the importance of culture. The Priorities fully acknowledge the financial challenges faced by the sector but also look to the future, setting the direction and articulating how we can harness the talent, creativity and collaboration we have within our sector. It is critically important we offer a strategic framework for our sector to support decision making and we are committed to keeping the Priorities under regular review.

If, during the upcoming implementation review, the opportunity arises to re-visit the arrangements set out in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement, what would the Welsh Government's priorities be?

We have consistently set our priorities to the UK Government in relation to the TCA. Our short-term priorities have included seeking solutions to immediate issues such as the rules of origin for electric vehicles, trade barriers for live bivalve molluscs and seed potatoes, and visas for touring artists. We continue to raise more strategic issues such as improved energy co-operation and options to re-join EU programmes such as Horizon Europe, Erasmus and Creative Europe.

Our ongoing priorities and those for any discussions with the EU on the TCA, or other agreements outside of the TCA, will be determined by the context of relations between the UK Government and the EU. In turn this will be dependent in part on the one hand on the approach of the new European Parliament after the recent elections and a new European Commission; and on the other by the approach of an incoming UK Government after the UK General Election. Both parties need to be willing to negotiate to effect change.

In general terms, the economic relationship between Wales and the EU is vital to us and should be enhanced by the political relationship between the UK and the EU. The EU remains our closest, and most important, trading partner. We want to ensure our own policy, and the relationship we have with the EU, creates the best environment to allow our businesses to trade with the EU. We have always called for a deeper economic relationship than the one offered by the TCA, but this requires better political co-operation between the UK and the EU.

It should be noted that the review is a review of the implementation of the TCA, rather than the agreement in its entirety, and we need to be realistic about the significance of the changes that could be agreed. Nonetheless, we hope to be closely involved when it is time to formally review the TCA. Subject to developments in the meantime, our starting point for developing our priorities will be those we have long called for:

- The need for a veterinary and plant health (SPS) agreement to minimise administrative burdens and non-tariff barriers to trade
 - Addressing issues relating to mobility of workers and provision of services, such as the new barriers faced by touring artists
 - The need for improved arrangements on the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications to facilitate economic activity in key service sectors, such as research.
 - Exploring options to re-join EU programmes such as Erasmus and Creative Europe.
- Further priorities will be developed, as we move closer to the time of the review.

4. How does the Welsh Government think the issues faced by the cultural sector should be addressed in the short, medium, and long term?

In the short term, we remain committed to exploring opportunities for the UK to join the Creative Europe programme as a third country, as it has for the Horizon Europe programme. We have also called for the UK Government to negotiate with the EU on more flexible visa arrangements and to consider the other barriers faced by the sector. There are a number of possible solutions, from sectoral exemptions to bilateral agreements, but this first requires a willingness of both parties to acknowledge a shared problem and enter into negotiations. We intend to progress discussions on these matters with the incoming UK Government after the General Election. The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice will meet with Wales Arts International for an update on these and other Brexit related issues in the coming months.

In the medium term, with clarity established on the approach of the incoming UK Government and its relationship with the EU, the devolved administrations need to work collectively with the UK Government on international issues, engaging relevant partners in Wales from the beginning.

In the longer term, the Welsh Government is reviewing its international strategy and is supporting Wales Arts International to develop a new framework for supporting the arts sector to work internationally, within the framework of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the UN global goals.