



Delyth Jewell MS
Chair, Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations
Committee

delyth.jewell@senedd.wales

1 August 2024

Dear Delyth,

I am writing in response to your letter of 07 July, which requested further information following my attendance at the Committee's annual scrutiny session of International Relations on 19 June.

I would like to reiterate my comments during the session that our focus is on delivering our International Strategy and achieving meaningful outcomes for Wales. I welcome the Committee's support in key areas, particularly around the refresh of the Strategy.

The answers to each of your questions have been set out, in turn, in the annex to this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething".

VAUGHAN GETHING

Annex A - Response

Q1. Implementation Review of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement

We remain unclear of the exact scope of the upcoming implementation review of the TCA and the extent to which the review will allow for any significant changes to be made to the existing agreement.

The short-term priority needs to remain making the existing TCA work as well as possible and using the governance structures that exist under the agreement to raise issues, such as specific barriers to trade, with the EU. Nevertheless, my officials have begun to explore where we think any potential changes to the TCA could benefit Wales in the longer term. An EU and Trade working group has been formed, with representation from officials across the Welsh Government, so that we can begin to identify potential priorities.

At this point, it is not possible to provide a definite list of priorities. However, it is likely that we will want to fully explore the potential benefits of a Veterinary Agreement with the EU, subject to the principles that agreement would be based on, as well as cooperation with the EU on animal health and welfare more broadly. We also want to better understand options any review might provide that leads to more visa and permit-free routes for our touring musicians and creative professionals across all Member States.

Q2. Technical briefing on the TCA

I have asked officials to provide you with a technical briefing at the start of the Autumn term. You are welcome to share this paper with other Committees who have an interest.

Q3. International Strategy monitoring

I would like to thank the Committee for providing the list of actions that you have identified across the Strategy and its associated action plans. As mentioned during our scrutiny session, I have asked officials to move away from report writing and focus on delivering our activity. That said, I agree with the comments made by the Committee that it is important to have a clear set of deliverables which can be used to measure progress and I believe that these actions provide that clarity.

The Committee is aware that the International Strategy sets out a cross-government approach to delivering our international activity. This cross-cutting approach means that there are different delivery teams with responsibility for delivering the activity. Progress against our key deliverables was last reviewed during the initial development of the annual report and will now be out of date; therefore, officials are undertaking a review of progress against delivery as part of the review into the refresh of the International Strategy taking place in the coming months. I have asked officials to provide you with a separate briefing on the deliverables, as part of the work being undertaken on the refresh, to ensure that the most up to date information is provided.

Q4. Impact of budget reductions on the delivery of the International Strategy

All budgets across Welsh Government faced cuts - International Relations and the International Sustainable Development budgets were not alone in this. This is the unavoidable result of 14 years of austerity and broken promises on EU replacement funds. As a result, spend has had to be refocussed and reprioritised. For example, the

International Learning Opportunities programme was paused to allow for other work on our Wales and Africa programme to continue. Whilst pausing the ILO programme was challenging for our partners in Africa, it has given officials the opportunity to review the impact of post-Covid placements and make plans to refresh the programme – which has had a positive effect. Many of the ILO placements have been highly impactful, either for the host organisation or the individual participant, as highlighted in the recently annual report, and this pause will allow proper consideration of our learning to take place. I hope that we can resume some placements later in this financial year.

We know budgets are challenging and will continue to be so; therefore, we prioritise our work to ensure we continue to deliver internationally with those countries and regions where the best outcomes for Wales can be achieved.

Due to budget reductions, we have explored alternative approaches, such as reviewing our diaspora initiatives. With a reduced International Engagement budget, we have integrated diaspora engagement into the ongoing activities of our overseas offices instead of maintaining a separate funding line for this work.

Q5 & 6. Funding for external partner organisations

I am proud of the Team Wales approach that we take to international engagement. It shows the world that Wales is a small country that can work together. In addition to funding our strategic partners, we work closely with a number of other partners including Amgueddfa Cymru, the British Council Wales, the Football Association of Wales and more.

The previous First Minister told you that we expected to see funding bids from our strategic partners in the early months of 2024. This was achieved. I appreciate that the Committee would like this process to have taken place earlier but, as you will expect, discussions with our partners identified that many of them were facing similar financial challenges, as a result of the challenging budgetary situation, and it was important that they had the time to plan and prepare for the year ahead.

We have worked hard within the financial parameters to protect the funding of our strategic partners. The Urdd received a slight increase in funding and Wales Arts International also received an increase to take forward a fund to support travelling artists to visit priority regions and begin new collaborations. The Office of the Future Generations Commissioner has received the same amount as last year. And, because of a different funding timeframe, we have not formally confirmed the amount of funding for Academi Heddwch but have discussed future funding with AH and will issue a grant letter shortly.

Organisation	Funding 2023-24	Funding 2024-25
Urdd Gobaith Cymru	£175,500	£187,000
Office of the Future Generations Commissioner	£200,000	£200,000
Wales Arts International	£215,000	£275,000
Academi Heddwch	£140,918	£140,918 (tbc)

Q7. Evaluation of 'Wales In' years

'Wales in' is a collaborative initiative convened by the Welsh Government to spotlight resource and mobilise internal and external stakeholder focus on a priority country to amplify existing links and invest strategically in new connections that bring long-term benefits back to the people of Wales. Now in its fourth year, 'Wales in' has evolved with each iteration - including our approach to evaluation.

Germany, our first 'Wales in' year, was a pilot held during the height of Covid travel restrictions and, as such, although an internal evaluation did take place, it was limited in its scope due to the constantly changing delivery environment. Canada was also subjected to an internal evaluation as the backdrop to delivery was also relatively unknown given the changing pace of the lifting of global Covid restrictions. However, to ensure robust accountability and analysis we commissioned an independent evaluation for our activity in France as this was the first year in which we could deliver a programme in stable conditions. The independent evaluation was also intended to provide assurance that our growing ambition for the 'Wales in' years was the right approach. I have asked officials to provide you with further details on the evaluation as part of our briefing on the international strategy refresh noted in Q3.

The purpose of the 'Wales in' model is to deepen existing relationships and create new opportunities for mutual growth across all areas of interest identified in our International Strategy. To date, the focus has been on countries where we have a presence in overseas markets. As the programme grows, an increased emphasis on monitoring and evaluation will further develop these criteria.

Decisions on 'Wales in' countries

Countries are agreed following evidence-based analysis which is focused on delivering a strong economic agenda and in response to strategic economic, political and cultural opportunities that have the potential to deliver significant long-term impacts and present a contemporary, diverse and inclusive Wales to the world. A key focus of previous 'Wales in' model was to raise the profile of our newer Welsh Government offices in markets, in order to develop links and relationships within their host country, as well as taking the opportunity to capitalise on the profile-raising opportunities provided by global mega-events (e.g. France Rugby World Cup 2023 and Japan World Expo). Welsh Government offices were established in Germany, Canada and France in 2018, providing a focus for these three countries, whilst Wales in India 2024 supports a renewed focus on this fast-developing market.

Planning future 'Wales in' years

The 'Wales in' model is delivered collaboratively with partners within, and outside of, government and Wales. The level of stakeholder engagement in planning and delivery necessitates relatively long lead-times for planning. As such, planning for Wales in Japan 2025 is already underway, and the second stakeholder group is taking place shortly which includes stakeholders across Wales, and Japan stakeholders. 2026's focus market will be confirmed shortly.

In order to achieve maximum value-for-money, the 'Wales in' model is seen as an accelerator for priority sectors where there is potential for long-term growth. To identify these, the 'Wales in' project teams co-produce a strategy at the outset of delivery with stakeholders. Each focus must be of mutual interest for the target nation.

The 'Wales in' years' work closely with UK Government and other agencies nationally and in-market. Alignment to UK and international priorities and programmes is crucial to increasing reach, securing additional funding streams and ownership thus providing value for money to the taxpayer.

'Wales in' activity is a combination of Wales-based and overseas stakeholders' budgets and resources, with significant programme activity being delivered by bodies external to the core International Relations team. Where suitable, projects are jointly delivered, match-funded or given support in kind from partners in-country - for example Wales in France worked with Nantes Metropole and Pays de la Loire regional government. This model has been shown to be an effective mechanism to draw down further financial support from national organisations. The Wales in France cultural fund made additional funds available to Wales via match-funding of partner organisations including the British Council France.

Budget

Budget for the themed years has been largely consistent each year although it did increase last year, in line with the programme's opportunity and the associated return-on-investment. This year's independent evaluation has been important to provide a robust evaluation and to make recommendations for future years.

Q8. Welsh Government Representative on Europe

The role of European Representative is unique in nature and has been celebrated by other Devolved Nations, and wider international counterparts, as an innovative way in which to promote Wales' interests and engage with European institutions and networks. I welcome the Committee's positive comments about the role and the impact that the current incumbent, Derek Vaughan, has had with regards to engagement with European institutions. We are currently considering the future of the role beyond its current end date, and I do not wish to pre-empt any HR decisions or processes that still need to happen. I will write to the Committee once a decision has been made.

Q9. International Relations Concordat

Intergovernmental working on international relations issues was raised at the Interministerial Standing Committee in May and October 2023. The Welsh Government is keen to ensure genuine intergovernmental engagement on this topic and will seek to discuss the most appropriate mechanisms to achieve that as intergovernmental meetings resume following the appointment of the new UK Government.