



Submission to the Senedd Legislation, Justice, and Constitution, and Culture and International Relations Committees

July 2025

This paper is submitted by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), further to Committee staff drawing to our attention the discussion at the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee session on 2 April 2025, during which WCVA's role and engagement with the Welsh Government in relation to the UK–EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) were referenced.

We welcome the opportunity to provide clarification and additional context regarding our involvement in this area, including recent and ongoing engagement with Welsh Government and our role on the UK Government's Domestic Advisory Group (DAG).

Background

In November 2023, WCVA gave evidence to the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee's inquiry into UK–EU governance, which was later published in the Committee's report. In that evidence, we highlighted the need to establish clear mechanisms to support greater coordination and engagement between Welsh civil society and government in relation to Wales–EU matters (such as the reinstatement of the EU Advisory Group).

Our Vice-President, Tom Jones, met with the First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS, to raise concerns about the limited capacity of Welsh civil society to engage meaningfully in the UK–EU civil society structures established under the TCA. The First Minister acknowledged these challenges and invited us to pursue the matter with his successor.

On 3 February 2025, WCVA wrote to First Minister Eluned Morgan MS, restating our concerns and formally requesting a meeting with the First Minister. This letter set out:

- The need to continue discussions held with the previous First Minister about the voluntary sector's role in projecting Wales's progressive and outward-looking identity.
- The importance of ensuring the sector can sustain its links with European partners and contribute to UK–EU TCA structures, including the DAG and CSF.
- The challenges around our capacity as the only Wales specific member of the DAG and the potential need for resource facilitate coordination and engagement in this space.

We are not aware of any new structures having been put in place, and while we have maintained ongoing contact with Welsh Government on various matters, we have not had formal, regular engagement specifically on the TCA during this period. We recognise that this may in part reflect wider changes within Welsh Government in 2024, as well as ongoing reviews of how formal sector engagement mechanisms operate between the sector and the Welsh Government under the Third Sector Scheme.

Recent Developments

We welcome the steps taken by Welsh Government very recently to re-engage on this agenda:

- In June 2025, WCVA has met with both the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Jane Hutt MS, and the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Rebecca Evans MS, where the UK–EU relationship and the role of the voluntary sector were discussed.
- Welsh Government also facilitated a constructive meeting between WCVA and Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, in his role as the UK Government's lead on UK–EU relations.
- We were invited to explore a potential application under Agile Cymru to support sector activity in this space.
- Welsh Government officials have indicated that membership of the Trade Policy Advisory Group (TPAG) could be an avenue for our continued involvement. However, as set out in our earlier correspondence, WCVA's capacity to participate in all trade fora is limited, particularly as the dedicated third sector resource we had come to an end and no alternate funding was put in place.

Given this, we have suggested that Ministerial Meetings under the Third Sector Scheme, which are intended to take place regularly could be resumed in the economy portfolio. As one part of their agenda, these would offer a practical and proportionate mechanism for information exchange and coordination around Wales's engagement with the UK–EU relationship. These meetings have not yet resumed following the change in administration

but we believe they could provide a valuable channel for civil society input into future developments.

WCVA remains committed to working constructively with Welsh Government and others in this space. We hope this note helps clarify our current engagement and supports the Committees' work in ensuring inclusive and coordinated governance in the context of the TCA.

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