

# Cross-Party Group Minutes

## Meeting Minutes:

<b>Cross Party Group Title:</b>	Wales International
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	8 July 2025
<b>Location:</b>	Conference Room A, Ground Floor, Ty Hywel, Senedd

## In attendance:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
Heledd Fychan MS	Chair (Member of the Senedd)
Brooke Webb	Support Staff (Heledd Fychan MS)
Sara Treble-Parry	Project Officer, British Council Wales
Abigail Llewellyn	Operations Manager, Cardiff University
Anjali Sanders	Policy Officer (East Asia and Americas), Universities UK International
April Heade	Senior Producer - Arts and Health programme, Welsh National Opera
Ben Pettitt-Wade	Artistic Director/Co-CEO, Hijinx
Brian Weir	Director of Academic Administration and

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	Student Experience, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama
Carys Wynne-Morgan	CEO, The Aloud Charity
Chris Ricketts	General Manager, National Dance Company Wales
Conny Matera-Rogers	Provost and APVC International, University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Dafydd Tudur	Head of Engagement, National Library of Wales
David Wilson	Advisory Group member, British Council Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Group
Dom Hastings	Director Arts, British Council China; Culture Counsellor of the Culture Education Section of the British Embassy
Elena Schmitz	Head of Arts Wales, British Council
Evan Dawson	CEO, National Youth Arts Wales
I-Ting Kao	Lecturer in Chinese Studies, Cardiff University
Jennifer Dudley	Arts Manager, British Council
Jocelyn Spittle	Executive Officer, Cardiff University - Cardiff Confucius Institute
Leah Coffey	Consultant - Language Assistants, British Council
Liz Jones	National Trust Cymru
Louise Amery	Deputy Director, Aberystwyth Arts Centre
Madelaine Phillips	Senedd Research, Senedd
Maggie Russell	Chair, Arts Council of Wales
Michelle Perez	Executive Director, Theatr Iolo
Nan Sun	International Development Manager,

	Wrexham University
Nico Ferguson	Assistant Consultant, British Council
Nikki Morgan	Senior International Officer, Wales Arts International
Osian Gwynn	Director, Pontio Arts
Ralph Rogers	Regional Head, China at the British Council
Ramakanta Patra	Senior Lecturer in Economics, Cardiff Metropolitan University
Ruben Chapela-Orrri	Project Manager, International Links Global
Ruth Cocks	Country Director Wales & Country Education Lead, British Council
Sara Moran	International, EU & Trade Senior Researcher, Senedd
Sarah Jones	Director, FOCUS Wales
Sian Holleran	Project Manager - International, Colleges Wales
Steffan Donnelly	Artistic Director and Joint CEO, Theatr Cymru
Susana Galvan Hernandez	Executive Director, Taith
Thomas Davies-Lyons	Education Manager, British Council
Victoria Ucele	Schools Project Manager, Cardiff University - Cardiff Confucius Institute
Xiaoli Wu	Lecturer and Programme Director for Chinese Studies, Cardiff University

### Apologies:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
Adeola Dewis	Director, Laku Neg Limited
Aobh McAnulty	Consultant Language Assistants Programme, British Council

Claire Furlong	Executive Director, Llenyddiaeth Cymru   Literature Wales
Delyth Jewell	Member of the Senedd
Dr Irina Neaga	Senior Lecturer, University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Emerita Menna Elfyn	Author, Poet, Playwright: PEN Cymru
Gundija Gough	Executive Directive, Kokoro Arts
Gwenfair Hawkins	Development and Production Executive, Ffilm Cymru Wales
Ioan Bellin	Senior Communications and Research Officer, Delyth Jewell AS / MS
Jane Dodds	Member of the Senedd
Lauren Walden	Research Fellow, Birmingham City University
Lhosa Daly	Director for Wales, National Trust Cymru
Luke fletcher	Member of the Senedd
Owain Gwilym	Director, Disability Arts Cymru
Rhodri Llwyd Morgan	Chief Executive, National Library of Wales

## Summary of Meeting:

### Chair's Welcome

A brief introduction of the panel and a run-through of the agenda was provided. The panel included Ralph Rogers, Regional Head, China, at the British Council and Dom Hastings, Director Arts, British Council China; Culture Counsellor of the Culture Education Section of the British Embassy.

The topic of the 'China Capability: Building for the Future' was introduced. Two China specialists joined us to take us through recent history and current day geopolitics of China and what it means for the future. The meeting had a special focus on arts and cultural links as British Council launches a new report '*A Guide to Arts and Culture Opportunities in China*' which is a practical guide to arts, culture and creative activities in China, designed to support UK stakeholders to better understand the trends and developments across China's cultural and creative sectors.

### **Talk with Ralph Rogers, Regional Head, China at the British Council**

Ralph went through his presentation on UK-China Relations: Context, Complexity and Cultural Opportunity, providing an overview of evolving relationship with China, and to explain why the Arts and Culture remain a meaningful space for cooperation, even amid complexities.

UK Government Response to Emerging strategic concerns:

- 2023 Integrated Review Refresh:
- China described as an “epoch-defining and systemic challenge.”
- Policy framework: Protect, Align, Engage.
- Protect national interests.
- Align with allies.
- Engage pragmatically where beneficial.

Key points from the Labour Government’s China Audit:

- Engagement with China is not optional.
- David Lammy: “Cooperate where we can, compete where we must, and challenge where we need to.”
- Culture and creative sectors are seen as viable spaces for cooperation. Arts and Culture stand out as an area where the UK is actively encouraged to engage.
- The audit confirmed that China literacy in the UK is underdeveloped.

Economic and Cultural Engagement:

- Pre-COVID: Chinese tourism contributed ~£2 billion annually to UK economy.
- Arts, culture, heritage, and education are key drivers of tourism.
- Cultural exchange is also about understanding and influence, and reciprocity.
- UK–China engagement must be two-way, by not just taking UK art to China, but by also bringing Chinese culture to UK audiences.
- Wales’ rich cultural heritage makes it a strong candidate for meaningful collaboration with China.

British Council Strategic Imperatives:

- Building long-term partnerships that survive political/economic challenges.
- Enhancing UK favourability among young Chinese people:
- Strengthening China capability in the UK via language learning, education, cultural engagement.
- Goal: Make China less of a mystery, more of a partner.

### **Talk with Dom Hastings, Director Arts, British Council China; Culture Counsellor of the Culture Education Section of the British Embassy**

Dom Hastings presented some of the guidance and findings from the report *A Guide to Arts and Culture Opportunities in Mainland China*. A few notes are captured below:

- The report is based on fieldwork carried out earlier this year by a researcher called Enke Huang. It's designed to be practical and accessible and reflects what's happening on the ground now.
- Culture is now central to China's development strategy – not just socially but economically and politically.
- Audiences are large, young and increasingly confident – open to international work, but more selective than ever.
- New policies are opening doors for collaboration – while also introducing some new complexities.
- The report starts by setting the wider scene – the social, digital and policy context in China – and then digs into five key sectors: Performing arts, visual arts and heritage, music, film, and literature.
- The report finishes with practical recommendations for artists, funders, organisations and policymakers – all based on experience, not theory, and importantly highlights some of the challenges to watch out for.
- The report identifies three major areas of change: policy, audiences, and industry.
- This report matters for Wales because Wales has distinctive cultural traditions, bilingualism, strong local identities, and internationally recognised institutions and artists. That's something Chinese cities and regions increasingly want to connect with – not just as consumers of international content, but as co-creators and collaborators.
- There's scope to develop in areas like, storytelling and heritage, traditional and contemporary music, and digital experimentation grounded in local culture.

Five opportunity areas:

- Digital heritage and creative tech
- Place-based collaboration
- Shared authorship / long-term collaborations
- Skills and governance exchange
- Cultural exchange for its own sake, especially in music.

The challenges:

- Censorship exists – but what's possible can often be negotiated with the right local partner.
- Reciprocity is increasingly expected – not just presenting work in China, but also supporting Chinese work internationally.
- Digital platforms matter – WeChat is essential for professional exchange.
- Audience expectations are high – relevance and emotional connection matter more than scale.
- And finding the right partner takes time – many of the most successful UK-China collaborations began as informal conversations or exploratory visits.

Connections Through Culture and travel grants are available from the British Council. Travel grants will be available later next year. These will be shared when they are available.

Wales Arts International also offers similar travel grants.

### **Floor opened to discussion**

- It was agreed there is appetite with the Welsh HE sector to engage with China.
- Maggie Russell commented there is a real appetite from an arts perspective, and asked the group, how will the artists want to engage?
- Nikki Morgan noted that Wales Arts International, alongside British Council, facilitated a Wales and China Stakeholder Group between 2016-2020. From a cultural and arts perspective, there was a framework in place because the government had an MoU at the time, and resources were available. There has been some activity post-pandemic, but the framework has diminished due to competing priorities.
- Currently, Dom Hastings has not had any engagement with Welsh Government offices in China, but colleagues in other offices may have.
- Osian Gwynn has been working with the International Recruitment Office at Bangor Uni to identify and engage with university partners in China. Organisations that Pontio have fostered a partnership with are Nanjing University of the Arts and Shanghai Theatre Academy. Osian noted that, while theatres and public programmes don't work the same in China, there is a real opportunity for cultural collaborations with artists and cultural organisations, as well as HE.
- Ralph Rogers reiterated that appetite has diminished across the four nations due to Covid and the travel restrictions, and government rhetoric. Institutions have also lost the knowledge of how to engage with partners in China, or how to find new partners. However, there is now more positive rhetoric from Westminster, and the China Guide will help guide organisations on how to engage with China. Wales Arts International noted China as a key strategic region back in 2018, and it will be interesting to see appetite build back up in Wales.
- Chris Ricketts raised that National Dance Company Wales are very interested in collaboration, but their international interest is moving away from straight touring into how they work with artists in different nations and how to build cultural value in a different way. Collaboration takes more time and resource, and we need to think about how to engage much deeper than a transactional relationship. We need connections and support on where are the right places to go.
- Ramakanta Patra asked what is the commonality between Chinese culture and art and Wales? There is far more that unites us than divides us. Examples include sharing real life experiences, things that resonate globally, sharing life in Wales and how that resonates with areas in China, a deep connection to nature, a respect for traditions, spirituality, poetry, community, concerns that we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, health and wellbeing in the arts, aging population, and gender equality.
- Evan Dawson noted it will be interesting to develop relationships for Welsh youth to collaborate with Chinese youth. It would help to have a steer from Welsh Gov about this. There are many parallel organisations to National Youth Arts Wales in China, including commercial and state-run.

- Ben Pettitt-Wade went to Shanghai in 2018 and ran workshops with ACOrange, but contact has been lost since then from the pandemic. Hijinx would be interested to rekindle the relationship, but this is difficult considering the challenges that come with supporting disabled artists.
- Steffan Donnelly expressed that, when working with Wales China Festival, they worked with institutes in China but had been met with difficulties when they wanted to platform a queer Chinese artist. Steffan wondered if there were any examples of working with artists who don't fit the status quo in China.

**Comments from the chat included:**

No comments.

**Summary, actions and close**

- Ralph recommends that Welsh Government visit China and to work with British Council for guidance. Appetite has really increased just within the last year in Westminster. That is translating to increased engagement in cultural sectors in China.
- Dom finished with recommending strengthening government relationships via routes like an MoU with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which would open opportunities with state-run and state affiliated cultural organisations in China. There is also a huge opportunity to work with private and independent arts sectors. There are examples of artists from different backgrounds successfully working in China. Safeguarding is very important and British Council can offer advice on how to engage.
- Action: Heledd Fychan MS will write to Eluned Morgan to pose the questions raised today, reflecting on the guidance being published, and will later circulate a response.
- Heledd noted that there is an election next year in Wales and that there's a need to engage with all political parties. This may be something to reflect on at the next Cross-Party Group meeting in terms of some of the manifesto asks more broadly.