

# Cross-Party Group Minutes

## Meeting Minutes:

<b>Cross Party Group Title:</b>	Senedd Elections: International Priorities
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> November 2025
<b>Location:</b>	Tŷ Hywel, Conference Room C&D

## In attendance:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
Heledd Fychan MS	Chair, Senedd Constituency Member
Eleri Morgan	Translator
Adele Thomas	Co-General Director/ CEO, Welsh National Opera
Alexandra Nita	Project Coordinator, MFL Mentoring
Alun Davies MS	Senedd Constituency Member
Alun Gruffudd	Communications and Parliamentary Affairs Officer
Amanda Morgan	Project Manager, International Links Global
Aneurin Minton	Staff Lindsay Whittle
Angharad Davies	Staff Rhys ab Owen
Angharad Jones Leefe	Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredol a Chyd-Brif Weithredwr, Theatr Cymru
Annika Axelsen	Study Abroad Coordinator, Cardiff University

Brooke Webb	Communications Officer and Parliamentary Affairs Officer
Catherine Young	Artistic Director, Dawns i Bawb
Catrin James	Head of Policy Grants and Governance, Urdd Gobaith Cymru
Catrin Roberts	Pennaeth Cysylltiadau Allanol, Cyfathrebu a Nawdd, Amgueddfa Cymru
Christine Monks	EU & International Development Officer, Bangor University
Dafydd Rhys	Chief Executive, Arts Council of Wales
Deborah Keyser	Director, Tŷ Cerdd - Music Centre Wales
Derek Walker	Future Generations Commissioner for Wales
Dr Bethan Gordon	Dean of the School of Art & Design, Cardiff Metropolitan University
Elena Schmitz	Head of Arts Wales, British Council
Ellie Bevan	Head of Programmes, Policy and Engagement, Taith
Eluned Hâf	Head of Wales Arts International (Arts Council of Wales)
Fadhili Maghiya	CEO, Watch-Africa CIC
Gabriela María Alonso López	Spanish Embassy Education Office in the UK
Glesni Owen	Operations Manager, MFL Mentoring
Glesni Price	Producer, Theatr Iolo
Guto Brychan	Chief Executive, Clwb Ifor Bach
Gwenda Carnie	Director/Business Affairs Advisor/Non-Practicing Solicitor, Industry Media Consulting Ltd
Hayley Richards	Head of Programme Development & Policy, Welsh Centre for International Affairs
Howard Batey	Programme Manager - Going Global Partnerships, British Council
Ioan Bellin	Staff Delyth Jewell
Jennifer Dudley	Arts Manager Wales, British Council

Joe Paley	Head of International and Partnership Development, University of South Wales
Julia Barry	Chief Executive, Sherman Theatre
Laura Davies	Director of Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment, Cardiff University
Lee Walters	Chief Executive Officer, Ffilm Cymru Wales
Lhosa Daly	Director for Wales, National Trust Cymru
Lisa Tregale	Director, BBC National Orchestra & Chorus of Wales
Louise Miles-Payne	Director, Creu Cymru
Lucy Jenkins	Principal Investigator, MFL Mentoring Project
Michelle Perez	Executive Director, Theatr Iolo
Mick Antoniw MS	Senedd Constituency Member
Nigel Holt	Associate Pro Vice Chancellor International, Aberystwyth University
Osian Gwynn	Director, Pontio Arts Centre - Bangor University
Professor Paul Davies	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Wrexham University
Professor Rachael Langford	President and Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff Metropolitan University
Rhian Gibson	Director of Communication and Engagement, National Library of Wales
Rhiannon Wyn Hughes	Executive Director, Wicked Wales Film
Robert Davies	Director, Wales for Europe
Rose Matthews	Head, Global Opportunities, Cardiff University
Ruth Cayford	Head of Culture and Creative Industries, Cardiff Council
Ruth Cocks	Country Director Wales, British Council
Sara Moran	Senior Researcher, Senedd Research
Sara Novo Loureiro	Project Coordinator Overseas Programme, Coleg Gwent

Sara Treble-Parry	Project Support Officer Wales, British Council
Sarah Boswell	Chief Executive Officer, Wales Netball
Sharon Davies-Smith	College Director / Principal, The College, Swansea University
Sharon Gilburd	CEO, Welsh National Theatre
Sian Holleran	International Project Manager, ColegauCymru
Thomas Davies-Lyons	Education Manager Wales, British Council
Tom Woodward	Assistant Director, Universities Wales
Vanessa Palmer	Assistant Headteacher, Ysgol Calon Lan
Victoria Ucele	Schools Project Manager, Cardiff Confucius Institute (Cardiff University)

## Apologies:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
Julie Finch	CEO, Hay Festival
Natasha Ashgar MS	Senedd Constituency Member

## Summary of Meeting:

### Chair's Welcome

Heledd Fychan welcomed all who were present, provided a brief introduction of speakers and ran through the agenda. Speakers included:

- Tom Woodward, Assistant Director and Head of International, Universities Wales
- Ruth Cocks, Country Director Wales, British Council
- Derek Walker, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales
- Siân Holleran, International Project Manager, Colleges Wales
- Eluned Hâf, Head of Wales Arts International

Heledd noted that it's a very busy time for all parties ahead of the Senedd Election next spring, preparing and finalising their manifestos. Today's focus will be on the international priorities.

## **AGM**

Ruth Cocks proposed for the British Council to continue to act as secretariat for the group; and for Heledd Fychan MS to remain as Chair. No objections were raised and there were no other nominations.

Hayley Richards (WCIA) seconded the proposal for British Council to continue as secretariat, while Dafydd Rhys (ACW) seconded the proposal for Heledd Fychan MS to continue in her role as Chair.

### **Speaker 1: Tom Woodward, Assistant Director, Universities Wales**

Earlier this year, Universities Wales published the Wales Beyond Borders Report. It sets out a wide range of recommendations and with an overarching recommendation that there should be a strategy for international education in Wales. All other UK nations have one.

There is also a recommendation that there should be an International Education Champion. The UK Government has one, and we often see them and Scotland's Trade Envoy for Higher Education side-by-side on the world stage. Wales seems to miss out on opportunities like this.

Medr have a strategic duty to measure our global outlook. A member of their board designated to support this area would be useful.

It is fantastic that the international student levy has been ruled out.

Taith has been a really successful programme. There is the possibility to rejoin Erasmus, but we don't know when, so there must not be a gap in provision.

The Global Wales programme looks to increase profile, recruitment and partner opportunities on behalf of students and institutions across Wales. Tom noted that the programme's importance has significantly increased due to financial difficulties currently faced by higher education due to the decline international students

Study in Wales is the recruitment band of Global Wales. Before it started, only 5% of prospective students had even heard of Wales as a potential option before. This is now nearly at 50%.

A real barrier for immigration in Wales is to get a work visa after graduating - an individual needs to be earning £41k now to qualify. This is a very high salary in Wales, and therefore, we need to be making a case for a regional immigration policy that fits the needs of Wales.

### **Speaker 2: Ruth Cocks, Country Director Wales, British Council**

British Council's priorities will remain in line with our core mission (i.e. to build connections, understanding and trust between the UK and countries overseas through arts and culture, education and English language for peace and prosperity) but particularly looking to better evidence how our work to support peace and prosperity. New frameworks and programmes are being redesigned to reflect that as well as supporting the Foreign Secretary's key priorities particularly around growth and security e.g. for growth how higher education and creative industries support economic growth for Wales and the UK. Other priorities include migration and climate.

British Council supports Universities Wales' call for an International Higher Education Strategy for Wales and are looking at the opportunities rejoining Erasmus could bring.

For Wales, British Council will pivot towards the priorities of a future Welsh Government. The ultimate goal is to build connections, understanding and trust. There's mutual benefit in building cultural relations and creating opportunities for exchange. But given we are an arms-length body of the FCDO, the funding we receive also has a soft power driver.

Priority Markets are determined by a number of factors e.g. FCDO priorities, where there's opportunities for impact and growth. Currently the 'super priority' countries are China, India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Mexico. Bilateral relationship with major European partners remain crucial as does a renewed focus with Ukraine, Eastern Europe border and MENA. But, in terms of funding, there's an emphasis on Overseas Development Aid qualifying countries (ODA countries).

Ultimately, British Council is here to support the internationalisation of the sectors in Wales through the arts, education, non-formal education and language and we will always try to pivot to priorities of the Welsh Government.

- The first ask from British Council is that the future Welsh Government's priorities for international are articulated very clearly from Welsh Government. The Wales International Strategy was very helpful for understanding these and for all our networks overseas.
- The second ask would be for Welsh Govt. to work with British Council more. British Council Wales have a strategic partnership with Arts Council Wales through an MOU and are a founding member of Global Wales. British Council's network in over 100 countries is a brilliant asset and is there to be used. This network can bring greater impact to international work across Wales. We are stronger together.
- The third ask is: Wales receives funding and opportunities from the British Council from programmes that are UK wider. If Welsh Government were to provide additional funding for a uniquely Welsh and more bespoke offer for Wales, as we have with the Welsh International Education Programme (including the Patagonia Language Assistants Programme), we would be able to do a lot more for Wales working with our existing, programmes, products, services and networks.

### **Speaker 3: Derek Walker, Future Generations Commissioner Wales**

Derek Walker agreed that the Wales International Strategy and the three objectives had been extremely helpful for The Future Generations Commission as well, and it has led to important work and new relationships.

The Future Generations Commissioner priorities for a WG international strategy are:

- firstly, lean into the Future Generations Act. There is a lot of interest in our approach in Wales. This can help us open doors, to stand out and help draw people to Wales.
- The second point is: as well as talking about our approach, we also need to focus on what can we learn from other countries and bring that knowledge back to Wales.
- The third point comes from the COP30 outcomes: we see much more progress for climate change at a regional level, at a sub-national level and at small country

level. Participation in international networks can be very powerful and help Wales achieve its international objectives.

### **Speaker 3: Siân Holleran, International Project Manager, ColegauCymru**

ColegauCymru is the voice of the Further Education (FE) colleges in Wales. FE colleges offer vocational education and training, higher education courses, A Levels, bespoke employer training, apprenticeships and adult learning.

The FE sector's international priorities are focused on its internationalization strategy, which was launched in 2022 and will be reviewed in 2026. The mission of this strategy is to create global citizens and networks and has four strategic priorities:

- Inspirational global experiences, providing equal access to all learners and staff to overseas opportunities
- Improving leadership, teaching and learning, by promoting CPD opportunities for staff to share and learn with others across the world
- Purposeful partnerships and promoting Wales, developing sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships
- Develop international business for the FE sector, via recruiting international students or help colleges build capacity to work overseas

The ask from a future Welsh Government is to:

- Continue to support the Taith programme. Taith Pathway 1 has focused the sector on ensuring that funding will reach those who are traditionally underrepresented in overseas mobility. Taith's Pathway 2 funding has had an impact on ColegauCymru's Leadership, Teaching and Learning priority. It has enabled them to share expertise and learn from international partners, address key sectoral priorities and provide a broader perspective to consultation responses through international engagement.
- ColegauCymru is committed to the FE sector being included in the discussions to the return of Erasmus+, to strengthen relationships with European partners and ensure that our A Level and HE learners are able to access the FE/VET strand of funding.
- Siân agreed it would be useful to have an International Education Strategy for formal education sectors, as well as informal ones. Promotion of Wales globally as a study, training and work destination would benefit from a cohesive strategy.

### **Speaker 4: Eluned Hâf, Wales Arts International (Arts Council of Wales)**

*Translated from Welsh to English.*

As Wales Arts International, the international agency of the Arts Council of Wales, we are also a strategic partner for the Welsh Government and have a long-term partnership with the British Council in Wales. Arts Council of Wales is the body responsible to develop the arts in Wales.

The new 10-year strategy reflects this, as it strives to work for the people and the planet. There will be a focus on gaining insight into the interest in international aims, like language, culture, which helps us meet global goals. This method caters to international countries like Japan, especially. The year of Wales and Japan saw many partnerships and collaborations through funded programmes.

These are three priorities for the new government:

- Developing artists – new international opportunities, looking at what’s happening internationally, and looking at the legacy of the work that’s already happened. Working very closely with all four nations. Strive for co-funding, artists to be in exhibitions and networks, being present on an international stage. There is a great benefit in artists meeting each other internationally.
- Cultural relations – large-scale events (including sporting events) brings a large international profile to Wales. It was a gamechanger to include language and international as part of the Culture Minister’s portfolio.
- Welsh Leadership in policy influencing – Brexit has had a large impact on the arts sector. There is a strong ambition to re-join Creative Europe, either as part of the UK or for Wales. This will need to be funded and advocated for. The impact of Brexit has caused challenges in the sector for young artists and organizations that want to work internationally.
- A full Culture Minister is essential

Arts Council of Wales are committed to supporting a Welsh presence at significant international showcasing events, including the Edinburgh Fringe and Venice Biennale, but also to support international festivals in Wales such as Focus Wales and Artes Mundi.

### **Open discussion**

Ellie Bevan: We welcome the return to Erasmus+; Taith could potentially fill a gap in Erasmus, which is school and youth sectors. The numbers are also much higher in Wales with Taith. Universities traditionally engage the most with Erasmus and the programme was initially set-up for them. One said that their numbers would halve going back to Erasmus, as they’re currently offering opportunities under Taith. However, there is a place for both programmes to exist.

Catrin James: Taith is an excellent programme for young people who wouldn’t normally have these opportunities and has an accessible application process. It offers funding and opportunities then for the people of Wales to travel, and to welcome people to Wales.  
*(Translated from Welsh)*

Amanda Morgan: International Links Global support schools across Wales to work internationally. Having access to Taith money has enabled us to send staff and pupils all around the world. There has been no mention of schools in the debates for Erasmus+. Schools will miss out on the access to these opportunities. Ideally, Taith will also be funded.

Rachel Langford: In languages education, such as mobilities through the medium of English, the uptake in GCSEs is very low in Wales compared to England. An all-Wales connected approach towards language learning is needed. Research shows that there is an economic benefit to this.

Rhiannon Wyn Hughes: We work in the creative industries in Rhyl, which is an area of deprivation. A highlight has been being involved in an international network of youth film festivals and other film organisations. It started with 15 members 10 years ago but now have 58 from all over the world. Rhiannon will ask partners from other countries how they are able to have an active international exchange and will circulate information on how they do this and fund it.

Nigel Holt: The SDG goals is almost hidden in the UK, whereas they are front and center everywhere else in the world. We need to ensure we are involved in international networks

and align with everyone else, and this will help with our partnerships. We as Wales should lobby and support the continued development of nations.

Hayley Richards: We need a values-based approach to international work. We have seen the international work of Wales being undermined by certain sectors within society. There will need to be strong leadership in the new government to highlight the importance of international work in Wales and to sell this story to those who aren't invested. There also needs to be more programmes to work towards the Globally Responsible Wales goal, and continue work with Wales in Africa, and support for Ukraine and Gaza.

Gwenda Carnie: Gwenda used to be the Welsh rep on Pact Council. The feedback then was that there was insufficient representation from Wales in international film and television festivals around the world. Gwenda also runs a business affairs company, who advises film producers to help co-productions happen internationally. We don't have enough people doing this in Wales. We need to ensure we have the right skills to do this.

Dafydd Rhys: There is some great work happening internationally. It's important to consider creating a long-term structure. When there is only funding from year-to-year, it is difficult to have a long-term strategy.

Ruth Cocks: What do we want to change and develop in Wales and internationally? Having an integrated strategy will help show how everyone is involved and can play a part.

Eluned Hâf: There is power in the diaspora, and there is so much potential to work with other countries, like Ireland, and see how we can develop and learn from them.  
*(Translated from Welsh)*

Heledd Fychan: As part of the work that the Culture Committee is currently working on, we are working to deliver what wasn't delivered under the international strategy, such of which the Welsh government has stated was due to the impact of Covid. Sectors need to communicate to the new government the benefits to Wales of working internationally to ensure there are commitments in manifestos. *(Translated from Welsh)*

Fadhili Maghiya: There needs to be more support for international students, as it can be very challenging to arrive and climatise, and to feel embedded within the Welsh community. Wales also to think beyond Nigeria when connecting with Africa. There are strong connections with Uganda, Namibia, etc.

Heledd Fychan: Is this important where international sits within government?

Hayley Richards: Welsh Council for Voluntary Action has a third sector partnership council, and there are meetings with ministers. When there are issues with the third sector meeting with the international minister, then there aren't regular meetings with the sector, due to it being in the First Minister's portfolio.

Ruth Cocks: Having a figurehead for an integrated approach will help like e.g. an International Minister but then you have to offset it with the benefits of being directly under the First Minister's portfolio.

Ellie Bevan: On where it sits, it doesn't really matter. The UK's international strategy focusses on higher education and business, but they're not as involved as much they could be. There's a huge interest in international sectors that aren't normally included, like schools.

Eluned Hâf: noted that her point earlier about the Culture Minister having a portfolio of language and international is really important. A lot of our international work involves culture and languages. Ministers do need to go to international countries. *(Translated from Welsh)*

Gwenda Carnie: Welsh language abroad is seen as a success story. Is there something we could be doing to be part of festivals for minority languages?

Alun Davies: Alun noted that the First Minister's personality and political priority is what matters. Permission for travel was a real problem.

### **Comments from the chat included:**

Nigel Holt: BC MASSIVELY valuable, fully agree with Ruth.

Sian Holleran: As we're discussing all things international - Welsh FE colleges and some universities are hosting the UK finals of the Worldskills competition on 25/11 and 26/11 this week. This is an inspiring global competition giving talented vocational learners an opportunity to compete and showcase their expertise on a global stage in a wide range of skills. Here's a link to livestream the events - worth a look if you've never had the opportunity to see these events previously. Diolch - National Finals 2025 livestream | WorldSkills UK | <https://www.worldskillsuk.org/>

Laura Davies: I'm sorry I need to drop off for another meeting. I wonder if we are thinking enough how international takes Wales to the world - our activity overseas can build brand Wales and display confidence and ambition. At Cardiff University, we are finding that our transnational education can develop new pipelines of interactions with business, third sector and other education organisations across continents. Diolch pawb.

### **Summary, actions and close**

Heledd Fychan highlighted that it's important to think about how we take these thoughts from today to the different political parties. Perhaps we can look at consolidating these asks over email.

The next Cross Party Group topic will need to be agreed for the new year. This can be a continuation of today's topic, or of something else ahead of the next election.