

WIR 01

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Cysylltiadau rhwng Cymru ac Iwerddon | Wales–Ireland relations

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru & Celfyddydau Rhyngwladol Cymru | Response from: Arts Council of Wales & Wales arts International

Introduction

1. The Arts Council of Wales is the official public body responsible for funding and developing the arts in Wales. We are accountable to Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament and responsible to the Welsh Government for the way the money they provide to fund the arts in Wales is spent. We are also a Lottery distributor for the arts in Wales.
2. This evidence is submitted by the Arts Council of Wales, informed by the knowledge and experience of our international in-house agency, Wales Arts International.

Wales-Ireland relations post-Brexit

3. Post-Brexit, the importance of Ireland as our closest EU neighbour has been reinforced. At a cultural level, there is a willingness to continue with collaborations between the arts sectors, but as with many EU member states, the perception of the UK has changed since the EU referendum and exit. We have had to increase our efforts to continue to support and strengthen ties with Ireland.
4. The existence of the Common Travel Area has gone some way to enabling the movement of people between Wales and Ireland to continue, which is helpful in the arts sector when working cross border on some short term and longer-term projects. However, the changes with regards to movement of goods has been one that the arts sector (particularly performing arts and visual arts) have had to adapt to.
5. Our [Arts Infopoint UK initiative](#), in partnership with our sister arts councils across the UK, has been supporting the sector in looking at some of the practical issues for artists – with a focus mainly on incoming to the UK, but also with outgoing mobility to the EU as many practical questions have been raised by the sector. We will be

looking at developing specific information for artists working between UK and Ireland later in 2023.

Current approach to bilateral engagement between the Welsh and Irish governments and whether it is fit for purpose post-Brexit

6. Wales Arts International works in partnership with the Welsh Government's International Relations Team and the Welsh Government office in Ireland. For example, we helped deliver the Wales week events in Dublin 2020; and we launched our [Gwrando - Dewi Padraig dialogue](#) in May 2022 in Dublin.
7. The Welsh Government office in Ireland, along with the establishment of the Irish Consulate in Cardiff and the support given by both governments in particular to the arts and culture sector has been beneficial to the arts sector in Wales in developing relationships in Ireland.
8. Whilst we are still to see the full impact of post Brexit (and post pandemic) on the arts sector's international work, we reiterate that even greater efforts are needed post-Brexit to develop and strengthen our relationships with Ireland.

The Ireland-Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan (2021-2025) as an approach to international engagement.

9. While there are some areas (eg Arts Infopoint UK) where we work across the 4 nations of the UK with Ireland, we find it very helpful to have a Wales specific approach and plan that is distinctive, as culture is devolved and we are able to have a bilateral relationship with our equivalent agencies in Ireland.
10. We welcomed the inclusion of Culture, Language and Heritage as a key theme in the Shared Statement. One of the actions is to "support the strong and growing relationship between our Arts Councils, Wales Arts International and Culture Ireland through a virtual stakeholder group meeting to further develop and enhance cooperation". Wales Arts International has continued to nurture the relationships between the agencies, with a view to re-establishing the virtual stakeholder group now that the changes in senior leadership in all 3 agencies over the past 2 years have happened.

The funding of future cooperation and collaborative projects between Ireland and Wales

11. Wales Arts International /Arts Council of Wales have supported a number of artistic projects through a combination of our International Opportunities Fund and some strategic funding. For example, in 2022 we supported visual artist Sean Edwards' solo exhibition *Chased Losses* in Temple Bar Gallery & Studios, Dublin; as well as Jony Easterby's light and sound installations *Remnant Ecologies* as part of Dublin Fringe Festival. We've supported Welsh language musicians and artists to participate in collaborative performances in the Gaeltacht through Celtic Neighbours in 2019 and 2022. We hosted REIC x Y Stamp: a multilingual Spoken Word and Poetry Performance to mark International Women's Day in 2020 to explore active connections between poets. The event featured performances by Ciara Ní É, Dairena Ní Chinnéide, Taylor Edmonds, Llio Maddocks and Sian Miriam in Welsh, Irish and English.
12. We have also piloted a 4 Nations International Fund in 2022, with a number of UK/Ireland projects (with partners in Wales). One example is the collaboration between Articulture/Green Man Festival (Wales); Articulation/Surge (Scotland); Out There Arts (England) and ISACS / Spraoi Festival (Ireland). The award, alongside other funding, supported artist development and professional networking opportunities plus touring of outdoor art works across all nations.
13. However, these are relatively small amounts and the arts sector in Wales undoubtedly feels the loss of both Creative Europe funding and Interreg Ireland-Wales funding and access to participation in these projects and networks. It would be beneficial to have Ireland specific funding opportunities for Wales. For the arts and culture sector, this could include funding for projects within the specific priority areas listed under the next questions, but in particular we are keen to develop a four UK nations and Ireland project around music and sustainable touring (particularly if Manchester are successful in their bid to host WOMEX in 2024).

Priority areas for cooperation between Ireland and Wales

From Wales Arts International/ Arts Council of Wales perspective we are prioritising the following:

14. Wellbeing and Arts and Health – we supported for some of the policy makers and leading practitioners in Wales to start a conversation with partners in Ireland at Creative Ireland's Arts and Mental Health conference in 2020 and there was a big appetite for that peer-to-peer sharing of practice.

15. Language learning and listening. As part of the UN Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032, we are supporting artists to listen to indigenous languages through our Gwranddo programme. This includes activity in Ireland. There is interest in the Welsh language arts sector in Ireland and Arts Council of Wales participated in a British-Irish Council delegation (sub group on minority languages) to Connemara in 2022
16. Development of sustainable touring routes for performing arts companies / musicians and sharing of good practice such as Theatre Forum Ireland's [Green Arts Initiative](#). This is something we are keen to develop over the next few years, both from a sustainability perspective, but also looking at new touring models in a post-Brexit context.
17. Peer learning and sharing around Wellbeing of Future Generations act
18. Exchange opportunities for young people, building on the work that the Urdd have developed with TG Lurgan.
19. Music – continue to nurture important relationships around:
 - a. Horizons at WOMEX partnership in 2023, 10 years after the partnership was created at WOMEX 13 Cardiff
 - b. Lleisiau Eraill Aberteifi & Other Voices Dingle partnership
 - c. Nurturing Celtic Connections at Showcase Scotland and Lorient festival in France

Opportunities in developing parliamentary relations between the Senedd and Oireachtas

20. There is an unprecedented opportunity for the Senedd and the Oireachtas to focus on the opportunity to learn from the amendment made by Arts Council of Wales in 2015 to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act that made Culture the fourth pillar of sustainable development, making Wales the first nation to do so and which lead directly to the wellbeing Goal around Culture and the Welsh language. This move was inspired by the international [Agenda 21](#) United Cities and Local Governments.

Arts Council of Wales / Wales Arts International

17 February 2023