

WGIR10 British Council

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

[Strategaeth Ryngwladol Llywodraeth Cymru](#) | [Welsh Government's International Strategy](#)

Ymateb gan: British Council | Evidence from: British Council

1. What is your relationship, if any, to the International Strategy?

The International Strategy is highly relevant to the work of the British Council. British Council Wales was part of the consultation for the 2020-2025 International Strategy. It is referenced as an organisation with whom Welsh Government will collaborate to achieve their ambitions. Equally, one of the key priorities for British Council in Wales is to support the international ambitions of the Welsh Government.

The strategy has been helpful in shaping British Council Wales' priorities. It is also a useful snapshot for our entire organisation to understand Wales' international priorities. This helps build collaboration between Welsh Government and British Council network of over 100 offices overseas, as well as back in Wales. We have used elements of the strategy in our briefings about Wales to partners, stakeholders and staff including our Country Directors overseas and to feed into Heads of Missions briefings with the FCDO. The three core priorities went out in our briefing packs to our offices in 100 countries worldwide.

British Council Wales also published a Soft Power Barometer Report for Wales in 2018. This was presented as situational analysis on Wales' current work in soft power and included a series of recommendations. There is read across between this research and Welsh Governments' International Strategy.

British Council's core work in Wales speaks to the three priorities set out in the strategy:

- Raising Wales' profile; as a UK cultural relations organisation, we ensure Wales is well represented as a distinct nation within the UK for British Council's work across arts and culture, education and English. We have
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supported Welsh Government's Focus years (e.g. Our Cultural Fund in partnership with Welsh Government and Wales Arts International for 'Wales in France' and 'Wales in India' respectively). We supported 12 international projects with artists and provided world-class platforms on which Welsh artists can perform e.g. BBC National Orchestra of Wales at Lorient Festival Interceltique, Delhi's 'Centre Stage festival' and Hornbill, Eunic's Long Night of Literature in India. We ensure our Directors and colleagues across our network of 100 offices overseas understand Wales's priorities, values and strengths and are able to represent those. We brief new Heads of Mission on the 4 nations which includes the International strategy for Wales.

- Promoting Wales as a globally responsible nation; climate is a cross-cutting theme for British Council's work and we have a number of examples of our work in Wales to support this priority. For example, working with Black Mountains college on a climate resilience course for 100 creatives across wider Europe and the UK, fostering and building a cohort of climate-focussed school partnerships for Wales, a 'Mock COP' for young people at the Temple of Peace in partnership with Welsh Centre for International Affairs, strengthening climate awareness and building the climate diplomacy skills of the future generation and supporting Wales' presence at global climate events such as COP.
- Growing the economy; our work in education and English offers education and English imports and export opportunities for Wales. We broker relationships and lead policy delegations between Welsh universities, further education colleges and English-language schools and their counterparts overseas that can lead transnational education (TNE) partnerships and offer grants to kickstart these partnerships. We position Wales as a study destination for international students through Study UK and our HE/FE agents quality framework and research. Our work in Arts promotes the creative economy in Wales and build international connections that can lead to economic benefits.

2. What are your views on the Welsh Government's International Strategy – what's worked well and any areas for improvement?

The fact that Welsh Government has a clearly articulated international strategy is in itself important, as it signifies the value it places in international work as an outward looking and globally responsible nation. This is important to understand Wales' place in the world and the context for international collaboration.

The International Strategy is clear. It sets out a vision, ambition and priorities for Wales' work internationally. This is helpful for others who work in Wales and internationally, and for those who look to support this work. Having three clear priorities and outlining the ways in which they will be delivered is also clear. However, there may be merit in an even more clearly articulated, shorter strategy.

Drawing on Wales' key assets and strengths throughout the narrative, helps to strengthen our unique identity and brand. British Council Wales has used this narrative when talking about Wales internationally and we have shared this with our overseas network to enable them to better support and consider Wales (and the devolved nations of the UK more generally).

The three key priorities of the strategy are clearly articulated and easy to understand.

1. 'Raising Wales' profile'. The results of this are evident, with over 100 diplomatic visits to Wales in the last year. The next stage is how to prioritise relationships and interest and convert that into key results and purpose. This could be adopting a cultural relations approach and build on the work that has started on cultural diplomacy (including education and sports diplomacy). Welsh Government could look to align this soft power approach with UK foreign policy priorities and draw more widely on UK organisations for Wales.

2. 'Promoting Wales as a globally responsible nation'. Wales' work in climate is world-class. We are a small nation but this allows us to be progressive. The Well-being and Future Generations Act is trailblazing and naturally attracts significant international interest. The Act should be at the heart of our efforts to promote Wales as a leader in sustainability. We should use that to our advantage: connecting with other countries; attracting interest and investment; and furthering people to people links. The tenth anniversary of the Act in 2025 should form a strategic part of this and Wales should leverage its natural international influence and attraction.

3. 'Growing the economy' - there are good results for the trade team as a result of the focussed campaigns, as detailed in Welsh government's report. There could be more emphasis on education as a commercial export and import for Wales which would link well to cultural diplomacy (with the interpretation of cultural relations to encompass education as well as arts and culture) that has a tangible commercial benefit.

One element of the strategy's implementation (but not referenced in the strategy itself) is Welsh Government's 'Focus Year' campaigns. These have focussed and

galvanised activities, brought key partners together and pooled resources to maximise impact around all three priorities of the International Strategy together under one geographic umbrella. The reporting on the Focus Years has also been helpful to measure impact and success for the year in question. The Welsh Government also provided a broader annual report on international work which was useful. I am not aware of any KPIs applied to the broader strategy to measure its success (outside the Focus Years) which might be something to consider for the future.

The Government might consider lengthening the duration of these Focus Years from one to two years which allows more lead in and reporting time. However, there is benefit of doing these years annually when there is a big event to focus on, e.g. Rugby World Cup for Wales in France 2023, or the World Expo for Wales in Japan.

3. What are your views on the Welsh Government's priority international relationships for 2022-25?

The priority international relationships are listed as US, Canada, France, Germany and Ireland. Our Language Trends Wales research highlights the decline in French and German learners and speakers in Wales. Over the last decade GCSE entries for French and German have halved in Wales. If Germany is a priority country for Wales and our third largest trading partner, and France and Canada on the priority list, we should be collectively looking to invest in the intercultural and linguistic language skills of future generations.

We would welcome working more closely with Welsh Government on connecting with the EU. There is real demand for greater interaction among EU partners, expressed for example during the recent UK/France Spotlight on Culture, our MoU on education and culture with Germany and our upcoming season with Poland. We fully support this part of the strategy and note how well this aligns with the new UK government's foreign policy objectives.

The loss of formal and informal networks, and intercultural knowledge and skills to work with the EU nations since the UK's exit from the EU and withdrawal from programmes like Erasmus Plus or Creative Europe cannot be underestimated. Opportunities to invest in and prioritise people-to-people links, culture and trade with Europe is critical. Increased efforts to reconnect with EU programmes or at least, EU frameworks, that would allow youth movement, as well as those for better artist and creative mobility is vital. Welsh programmes like Taith would

benefit from arrangements with EU countries being clearer. Wales can play an influencing role in this working with UK government.

Whilst the Wales in Africa programme is referenced in the strategy, no countries of the Global South are listed as a priority. That does not reflect future population and economic growth. For example, there is no reference to India, China and UAE (where Welsh Government have offices). It would be good to understand where these countries rank in terms of priority, given their growing influence in the world.

With increasing scrutiny over links between China and the UK and associated risks, we welcome Welsh Government's continued presence in China. British Council will be working closely with the FCDO on the China Audit including leading an education-related mapping on China capability within the UK (where we would like to include voices from Wales); it would be good to get clarity on Welsh Government's position with China in the new strategy.

Both the Welsh Government and British Council has a large overseas network. This presents an opportunity to operate 'beyond the sum of our parts' and join up where our objectives align. For example, the British Council is happy to offer our 100 strong network of offices overseas to the Welsh Government - which we did effectively in Qatar for the World Cup.

The regional links (e.g. Basque region of Spain and Brittany in France) have historical civic and linguist connections to Wales. Given the size of Wales, regional level links are sometimes easier to harness. However, given there is increasing international interest in Wales from a range of countries not currently listed, and given emerging powers and changing geopolitics, with countries like Brazil and Poland playing an increasingly important role globally, the benefits of working with regions and countries according to the relevant priorities could be weighed up in the new iteration of the strategy.

The increasing values-based approach adopted by Welsh Government in relation to working internationally is commendable, although we would caution against this driving decisions on engagement in countries where values don't align. This reduces the powerful impact of cultural diplomacy. It would be preferable to engage on the areas that do align whilst retaining one's own values, rather than disengage since there are many countries in the world whose values are not similar to our own.

4. What are your views on the availability of information on the Welsh Government's international activities and delivery of the strategy?

If Wales' is to truly be an outward looking nation, it's important to clearly evidence the benefits of working internationally not just in and of itself but specifically to the domestic agenda in Wales and how a global outlook benefits people in Wales, our policies and our future.

The overall objectives for the Government's international work are clear (and the Strategy, action plans, the annual report and the Focus Year groups enable good availability of information on this)

However, with the exception of the Focus Years, it is not always clear how success is measured for the strategy, and what the mechanism for overseeing implementation is. This would be helpful for partners like the British Council, to support the ambitions and come together in a way that creates most impact for Wales.

The Focus Year working groups have provided a good forum for strategic and forward thinking and planning. It would therefore be worth scoping a similar forum for key partners to come together to oversee delivery of the overarching strategy and assess impact.

Welsh Government's International Department's annual report this year was a helpful mechanism to see progress against the strategy. But it highlighted that we were not sufficiently joined up on some of the priorities (e.g. higher education work in China), where the British Council could have combined efforts with Welsh Government for greater impact.

Reporting on impact of international work is complex. Reporting on trade exports has been clear – it's an easier metric to articulate and the economic benefits are more obvious. Reporting on soft power or cultural diplomacy wins is complex. This is something around which British Council has designed evidence strategies and metrics for our own reporting requirements and understand the challenges of demonstrating. We would be delighted to share our learning in this space with Welsh Government and partners. All partners in the international space could come together and contribute to some core metrics for Wales International in the future iterations of the strategy to really focus our efforts to support delivery for Wales and the World.

5. In your view, what information on the Welsh Government's international activities should be in the public domain?

Whatever information is made public needs to be provided with context. International working can often be deprioritised as the domestic agenda of countries takes priority and Ministers come under a lot of scrutiny for international work (in particular travel). However, the impact of international working on the domestic agenda and how it directly affects the livelihoods, skills, ambitions and outlooks of people in Wales needs to be communicated and explained transparently if the people of Wales are to support an international strategy. In particular, working internationally, by its very nature, can be expensive, so data or costs or statistics need context and results presented alongside.

6. What are your views on how the Welsh Government's international activity is resourced?

If an international strategy is to succeed, then there need to be resources commensurate with the ambition. It is therefore important to have a team working on international priorities for Wales and to have Welsh government presence overseas working with the UK Embassies and trade partners. International work can and does run through a lot of other departments in Wales. But a team focussed on international matters (as is currently in place) is necessary if Wales truly is to be an outward looking nation. The strategy, the current team, the relationships and campaigns we have experienced have been excellent initiatives.

Previously Wales had a Minister for International, now the portfolio sits under the First Minister. There are advantages to both models. Where the First Minister retains Ministerial responsibility for international policy, this puts a premium on a strong structure sitting underneath the post to drive delivery and convene key policy makers - ensuring an 'all of Wales' approach. Either model should ensure international connections are across Wales' priorities, more so since the UK's exit from the EU, with a core team as the driving force but drawing across all government departments and partners for full impact.

There could be better read across between government departments working on international matters to get the best impact for Wales. E.g. departments in charge of education, arts culture and sport who have an international dimension to their work could be brought together more. This currently happens to some extent with the 'Focus Years' working group. This could be done through a governance

structure that brings together the combined work around a specific campaign e.g. education exports around student recruitment and TNE, and bodies such as Universities Wales, and Global Wales with the trade department from Welsh Government and British Council.

The newly formed Cultural Diplomacy group could also include education colleagues who could contribute to cultural relations type activity.

We'd encourage Welsh Government to draw upon UK wide organisations such as the British Council more, capitalising on our commitment to work for Wales and each of constituent nation of the UK. Working together and through others will enable the priorities for Wales to be maximised at a time when resource is limited across the public sector.

7. What priorities and priority relationships would you like to see included in the Welsh Government's approach to international relations beyond 2025?

Given the current spending and resource constraints across the public sector, there is a good argument to focus on a tighter strategy and set of priorities resourced appropriately drawing on partners for support (perhaps through more formal 'partnership agreement' structures). We would welcome closer and more strategic working with Welsh Government in this space.

The priority on increasing Wales' international profile, has largely been achieved. This could now convert into priorities and measurable results. In achieving this objective, Wales has often used cultural diplomacy and sports diplomacy as a vehicle. The 'Focus Years' are real testament to this. This is something Wales could build on, using the responsibilities devolved to Wales to increase international engagement and soft power benefits back to Wales. That said, whereas soft power has a benefit back to the home nation, cultural relations has a mutual benefit and this mutually beneficial approach could be embraced by Wales particularly given the values based approach to international work. What can the world learn from Wales but equally what can Wales learn from the world?

The Future Generations Act attracts international interest and learning and provides a wide thematic platform on which to build international engagement. In the British Council's recent Global Perceptions research, which samples 18-30 year olds' opinions from across the G20 countries, 'Climate' was listed by the young people of Wales as the second most important issue facing the world (43%) after poverty (54%). Wales' work in climate, is world -class and Wales can play a significant role globally in this.

Trade should continue to be a core part of the priorities as the international links and benefits to our economy are obvious. According to a London Economics report, education exports provided by Welsh Universities contributed £1.26 billion (11%) of the economic impact for of the Welsh HE Sector 21-22. Ensuring education exports are part of the trade strategy would also complement a cultural relations approach.

International work should benefit all people in Wales. How do we ensure we include those people who are less likely to have such opportunities and for whom, a once in a lifetime experience, might shape the course of their lives. Taith has been successful in working with disadvantaged groups. We can learn lessons from this approach and how we can offer international experiences to a wider demographic.

In that context, some questions Wales could consider:

- How will Wales' youth mobility offer evolve over time?
- How can we support the Tertiary sector in their international priorities? e.g. Does/should Wales have an international education strategy like Scotland?
- Could we bring together international education work to align more effectively with the new international strategy for Wales?
- How can we bring together various Welsh Government work across different departments on international to enhance the offer from Wales? E.g how can a new international strategy support the international elements of the new cultural priorities?

Wales should take more confidence and ambition on the international stage. The response to the refugee crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine shows what Wales can do. The thematic priorities coming out of Wales' international work (e.g . a nation of sanctuary, a globally responsible nation) all contribute our international brand. These could be built upon to ensure Team Cymru have a focussed narrative.

Operating outside of where Welsh Government has a presence can be very tricky. The British Council has a presence in 100 countries and we would always support any new connections Welsh government (and the relevant sectors) would want to make.

Equally, British Council Wales would welcome conversations between Welsh Government and the relationship with the FCDO. As our sponsoring government

department, there could be combined efforts that would achieve maximum impact.

8. Are there any other matters you would like to draw to the Committee's attention regarding the Welsh Government's international relations?

Wales does best when it is looking outwards. It is important our future generations grow up to be internationally minded, speak international languages and are equipped with the intercultural skills needed to work, trade and study with other nations. Our Language Trends Wales research shows GCSE French and German have more than halved and Spanish has reduced by 25% over the last ten years. We need take action to reverse the trend, understand provision constraints, and inspire young people again about language learning and the window on the world languages provide.

Schools, universities and further education colleges should embrace an international outlook to ensure our young people become global citizens equipped to work internationally and understand the world. That could be through international student recruitment, institutional partnerships, student exchanges, professional development visits, classroom resources and pupil to pupil links.

Although MEDR has a mandate to promote global outlook, the draft strategy did not go far enough but we welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the open consultation and we offer our full support to achieve this. The Welsh Government International team could work with MEDR and education institutions and partners to maximise global outlook for Wales (see above on trade and education)

Equally, we need to ensure our artists, arts organisations and creative industries can connect with creatives from other countries to enhance their practice through international experiences. This is all the more important since the UK's exit from the EU and the lost opportunities for Wales such as participation in EU-wide programmes, networks and access to critical funding. Welsh Government could work with UK Government to clarify and map out the future pathway.

Wales should continue to make the most of big moments internationally (such as the Qatar World Cup) which provide platforms to showcase our arts, sports, education, climate leadership, and language; while domestic mega events (e.g. in sport and music) are an opportunity to invite the world to Wales. Sports diplomacy plays a key role here but there are wider opportunities than just

sporting ones. Wales should take confidence in having a place at global UN conferences such as COP and the Summit of the Future.

Wales' International Strategy of the future could think about what this all adds up to for Wales in the international space and how to measure that.

Two next steps might be worth considering:

1. The Welsh Government could explore a defined soft power/cultural relations offer. Drawing together sports, language, arts and culture - with clear objectives and metrics for delivery

2. The Welsh Government could look at the extent to which its international objectives align with the UK Government's and could explore how a distinctly Welsh soft power or cultural relations offer might complement international relations work reserved to UK Government. New priorities emerging from the UK Government on international relations include foreign direct investment (FDI) for growth, soft power and climate. Wales' current work in international aligns with this and can grow to complement these priorities. In doing so, Wales could get more from UK organisations such as the British Council and we would be delighted to work more closely with Welsh Government.

For international relations to succeed, government to government (G2G) business to business (B2B) and people to people (P2P) relations need to work together. Wales can play a significant role, where devolution allows, particularly in the latter two which supports G2G relations.

We need to be clear on the benefits of international work to people back in Wales, with international running through all relevant policy areas. We must nurture globally minded citizens, intercultural skills and demonstrate how an internationally-minded Wales can demonstrably improve Wales' future and that of our people
