

WGIR18 Cardiff University

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: Prifysgol Caerdydd | Evidence from: Cardiff University

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

Cardiff University plays a key role in enhancing Wales' global presence and fostering international engagement. We are proud to be a truly global civic institution, with over 7,500 international students from more than 130 countries and formal partnerships with over 300 institutions worldwide. International collaboration is central to our mission.

Our strategic global partnerships are vital for driving innovation and facilitating knowledge exchange across academic, governmental, and industrial sectors. For example, our ongoing research collaborations with the University of Waikato in New Zealand highlight how we build mutually beneficial relationships, with significant advancements in areas such as Language, Culture, Arts, AI, and Environmental Studies.

Our strategic alliance with the University of Illinois (UI) exemplifies our commitment to deep, sustained international engagement. This partnership supports student exchanges, joint research, and collaborative funding opportunities, such as those through UK Research and Innovation and the National Science Foundation. These initiatives align with Wales' ambitions to be a globally connected nation and enhance Cardiff University's role in fostering international partnerships.

The Cardiff Confucius Institute (CCI) plays a central role in promoting Chinese language and culture, strengthening links with Xiamen University. Since 2008, CCI has delivered enriching cultural events across Cardiff, such as Lunar New Year celebrations at Cardiff Central Library and the Red Dragon Centre, attracting over 7,000 attendees in total. In collaboration with the Chinese in Wales Association and St Fagans National Museum of History, CCI also hosted a Chinese Cultural

Heritage Day that engaged over 5,500 visitors. Other initiatives, such as Chinese painting courses and craft activities, further engage the wider community and promote cultural exchange.

Cardiff University is fully committed to supporting Wales' global ambitions by driving education, innovation, and economic growth. Through our international partnerships, we not only enhance our institutional reputation but also ensure that the benefits extend to local communities, creating jobs, attracting talent, and fostering a vibrant, culturally diverse society. Our research on global challenges such as climate change, water, and environmental sustainability further positions Wales as a hub of expertise and innovation, aligning with international sustainability goals and the Welsh Government's broader strategic objectives.

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

The Welsh Government's International Strategy has been important in raising Wales' global profile and fostering valuable international partnerships. However, its potential has not been fully realised, particularly in terms of leveraging the higher education sector's capacity to attract international students, researchers, and businesses. Cardiff University has played a role in enhancing the global reputation of Wales, often surpassing the strategy's ambitions. Through extensive participation in global research networks and international collaborations, we have driven innovation, sustainability, and economic growth, stepping in where the strategy could have more explicitly supported the role of higher education in Wales' international engagement.

One of the strategy's successful aspects has been its emphasis on promoting Wales as a welcoming destination for international students. This has positively impacted both cultural exchange and the economy, with international students contributing through tuition fees, local spending, and enriching the cultural diversity of our universities and communities. Beyond economic benefits, these students foster soft power, creating lasting international goodwill and strengthening Wales' global ties.

The impact of the previous UK Government's immigration policies has been the single most challenging issue. Rising visa costs and the complexities surrounding work and study abroad placements have made the UK a less attractive destination for international students. We would encourage alignment between the UK Government's international education strategy and Welsh Government's

own ambitions in order to address the recent challenges in international student recruitment.

The ongoing challenges posed by changes in UK immigration policies, particularly those around student dependents and post-study work rights, also create obstacles. Adjustments to visa regulations and the broader narrative on immigration could deter prospective students, affecting Wales' ability to attract diverse talent. To address these challenges, the Welsh Government's International Strategy must more robustly support universities as key players in global engagement and economic growth. Welsh Government should seek to influence UK Government in relation to international education as decisions made by UK Government will have an impact on the ability to deliver on the international strategy.

The landscape for international student recruitment has also become increasingly competitive. Universities worldwide are enhancing their offerings to attract international students, requiring Cardiff University and Wales to differentiate themselves in a crowded market. Additionally, there is growing political pressure to diversify the international student profile, addressing concerns about over-reliance on certain countries. While we have traditionally recruited students from specific regions, we recognise the importance of broadening recruitment efforts to ensure a resilient and diverse international cohort. This push aligns with global trends toward more inclusive international partnerships.

Despite these challenges, there are several areas where the strategy could better support Welsh universities. Increasing support for joint research ventures, expanding funding for student mobility programmes, and investing in the infrastructure needed to sustain long-term international collaborations would help Welsh universities remain competitive globally. Additionally, broadening the strategy's geographical focus to include emerging markets like Central and Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America would unlock new opportunities for partnerships, investment, and academic exchange, enriching Wales' international presence.

Restrictive immigration rules have also made it more difficult to recruit international staff, which are essential for fostering long-term academic collaborations. Losing such opportunities would jeopardise valuable partnerships with institutions like the Institut Ramon Llull in Catalonia, undermining the academic cooperation that has been vital to establishing lasting international relationships.

While initiatives like Turing and Taith are valuable, they cannot offer the same comprehensive financial and logistical support that European Union membership once offered. The end of free movement for British citizens in the EU adds further barriers, especially for students from less privileged backgrounds, potentially reducing the diversity of participants in international exchange programmes.

While the Welsh Government's International Strategy has aligned with Cardiff University's mission in many respects, addressing challenges related to student mobility, immigration, and research funding will enhance the international standing of Welsh universities and the nation. By expanding the strategy's global reach, Wales can further solidify its academic and cultural influence and remain a dynamic, globally connected nation. With continued investment in higher education as a core element of the strategy, Wales can build on its successes and increase its impact on the world stage. As Wales' most internationally recognised institution, Cardiff University is committed to collaborating with the Welsh Government to support existing opportunities and develop new initiatives across all sectors of the economy.

Finally, Cardiff University, in common with many other universities, is considering future models of international education which rely less on students moving to our main campus and work with partners in a third country to provide teaching. Our strategy commits us to establishing "a network of well-developed, reciprocal, transnational education partnerships across the globe". We will do so while retaining full academic control over course content and validation. We would support dialogue with Welsh Government and other HEIs to understand how this approach can best fit into Welsh Government's international strategy.

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

The Welsh Government's focus on relationships with key regions—such as the USA, EU nations, China, and India—reflects Wales's overall strategic needs in education, research, and trade. These regions are central not only for attracting international students but also for advancing collaborative research and economic partnerships. While these priorities are sound, further opportunities exist to expand Wales's global influence.

In the post-Brexit landscape, strengthening ties with EU countries is particularly important. Welsh universities, including Cardiff, have deep-rooted collaborations with European institutions that foster academic exchanges and tackle global

challenges through research. To preserve and build on these connections, it's crucial for the Welsh Government to work closely with EU partners, maintaining accessible pathways for collaboration.

However, given the complex international landscape, we recognise that Welsh Government advocacy can be enhanced by coordination with the UK Government. Speaking with a unified voice on these international priorities may amplify Wales's influence globally, enabling us to leverage the broader UK network to support Welsh goals effectively.

At a UK level, we were delighted to see the UK re-engage with Horizon.

Expanding Wales's presence in Southeast Asia would be highly beneficial, with Singapore offering potential as a strategic hub. Singapore's status as a leader in innovation and education aligns well with Wales's international ambitions. By fostering stronger ties in this region, Wales could enhance student mobility and advance collaborative research in key areas such as sustainability, health, and technology. Similarly, relationships with New Zealand and Australia could be valuable, given the shared cultural and educational values that facilitate collaboration. These partnerships would not only benefit student mobility but also bolster research initiatives in areas like environmental sustainability, health, and technology.

Moreover, as we look to the future, diversifying our international relationships will be essential for resilience and growth. While established markets like the USA and EU are crucial, exploring emerging regions can lead to innovative collaborations and research opportunities that may not yet be fully realised. This approach not only strengthens Wales' academic landscape but also contributes to its economic vitality by opening doors to new investments and partnerships.

Expanding the international strategy's scope to include emerging economies and potential partnerships with countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Australia could add significant value. Recent focus on Vietnam and existing Welsh Government funding for initiatives in Canada also represent potential areas for growth. Strengthening ties with EU countries remains critical to sustaining academic collaborations post-Brexit. By cultivating these diverse international connections, Wales can enhance its global presence, supporting its universities in staying competitive and engaged on the world stage. This multifaceted approach will not only advance Wales's educational and research objectives but also enrich the nation's cultural and economic landscape.

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

Information regarding the Welsh Government's international activities and the delivery of the International Strategy is generally accessible; however, there are areas where it could be improved, particularly in relation to the higher education sector. While basic information is provided, more detailed insights into specific opportunities for collaboration would enhance engagement and support for Welsh universities.

One area for improvement is the establishment of clearer channels through which Cardiff University and other institutions can connect with the Welsh Government's international initiatives. Currently, engagement mechanisms can appear somewhat fragmented and indirect, making it challenging for universities to identify where and how they can contribute—and how WG can benefit from our extensive international engagement. Cardiff University is arguably one of the most internationally recognised Welsh brands, and a more structured and direct communication approach would allow us to link our international strategies with the Welsh Government's priorities, amplifying our collective impact.

Additionally, there is a need for greater transparency in sharing the outcomes and impacts of international activities. Detailed reporting on successes, challenges, and lessons learned would not only benefit universities but also foster a culture of collaboration and shared learning. This could include case studies, impact assessments, innovation activities, and best practice examples that showcase the contributions of higher education to Wales's global ambitions.

The Welsh Government's overseas offices are crucial in supporting international engagement and can serve as valuable facilitators of collaboration. Ensuring a consistent approach across these offices, with clear alignment to strategic objectives, would further enhance their effectiveness. Improved communication and coordination between these offices and Welsh universities would help maximise opportunities for collaboration and engagement, enabling higher education institutions to contribute more effectively to Wales's international ambitions. Strengthening these connections would allow universities to leverage the unique insights and networks offered by the overseas offices, amplifying their global reach and impact.

Furthermore, the Global Wales initiative focussed on priority markets—Europe, North America, India, and Vietnam— to increase student recruitment, grow partnerships, and boost the reputation of Welsh institutions internationally. However, as Global Wales is due to wind down by July 2025, we will need to see a

new approach by Welsh Government which includes, universities and other stakeholders and seeks to share information, discuss strategies, and develop joint initiatives. Such an approach would not only advance institutional and national goals but also strengthen the sense of community within the sector, enhancing Wales's global profile and impact.

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

First and foremost, detailed reporting on international projects and collaborations with universities is essential. This should include comprehensive profiles of current partnerships, highlighting the goals, outcomes, and benefits of each initiative. Such information not only showcases the breadth of Wales' international engagement but also serves as a valuable resource for universities seeking to identify potential collaborators or models for successful partnerships. Including metrics on research outputs, student mobility statistics, and economic impacts would further illustrate the tangible benefits of these activities.

As well as this, information on funding opportunities related to international activities should be clearly communicated. This includes details about available grants, eligibility criteria, application processes, and deadlines. By making this information readily accessible, the Welsh Government can encourage universities to pursue funding that aligns with both institutional objectives and national priorities. A dedicated portal or resource hub for funding opportunities could streamline access and facilitate connections between universities and potential funding sources.

Transparency about future goals and strategic priorities is crucial. The Welsh Government should outline its vision for international engagement over the coming years, including key focus areas and anticipated developments. This forward-looking perspective would enable universities to align their own international strategies with the Government's objectives, ensuring that both sectors work collaboratively towards common aims.

It would also be beneficial to share insights into the impact of international activities on research, trade, and education. Regular impact assessments and case studies that detail successful projects and partnerships can provide a clearer understanding of how these activities contribute to Wales' global standing. Sharing successes can inspire further collaboration and investment in international initiatives.

Information on the role and activities of the Welsh Government's overseas offices should be made publicly available. Understanding how these offices operate, the support they provide, and the regions they focus on would help universities tap into additional resources and opportunities. This information could foster more targeted and strategic engagement, enabling institutions to maximise their international reach.

Lastly, creating a feedback mechanism for universities and stakeholders to contribute their insights or concerns regarding international activities could enhance transparency and foster a sense of community. Regular consultations or forums would allow for open dialogue, enabling the Welsh Government to gather valuable input and adapt its strategies as needed.

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

Resourcing for the Welsh Government's international activities is adequate in some areas but requires expansion to support more academic and research-focused initiatives. While existing funding mechanisms provide a solid foundation, there is significant potential to enhance support for universities, including Cardiff University, to scale their international partnerships and increase both student and staff mobility.

One of the critical areas for improvement lies in the allocation of resources for joint research ventures. Additional funding specifically aimed at facilitating collaborations with international institutions would greatly enhance Wales' global standing in research and innovation. This would not only promote knowledge exchange but also attract further investment and interest from global partners, positioning Wales as a leader in addressing pressing global challenges.

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

Beyond 2025, the Welsh Government's approach to international relations should build on existing partnerships with established economies such as the USA, EU nations, China, and India, while also expanding into emerging regions like Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America. These regions offer significant opportunities for collaborative research, trade, and educational

exchanges, which would further enhance Wales' global profile and align with its long-term ambitions.

One key priority should be sustainability. Given Wales' commitment to addressing climate change, partnerships focused on renewable energy, environmental conservation, and sustainable urban development would not only highlight Wales as a leader in these areas but also provide opportunities for universities to engage in global research and innovation. Institutions like Cardiff University are already conducting cutting-edge research on environmental issues, and stronger international collaborations could amplify these efforts.

Health innovation is another critical priority, particularly in light of the global challenges highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Welsh universities, with their expertise in medical research, public health, and healthcare technologies, are well-positioned to contribute to global health solutions. Strengthening relationships with countries investing in health innovation—such as Singapore, South Korea, and Brazil—could facilitate groundbreaking research collaborations, benefiting both Wales and the global community.

Digital technology and innovation should also be a focus area. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected through digital platforms, the need for expertise in fields such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and data science grows. Wales could leverage its academic strengths in these areas to establish partnerships with tech hubs in countries like India, Israel, and the USA, creating pathways for joint research, student mobility, and innovation-driven economic growth.

It is also essential to prioritise diversity and inclusion in international partnerships. The Welsh Government should seek to collaborate with a broader range of countries and regions, particularly those from the Global South and emerging economies, ensuring equitable knowledge exchange. This approach would provide Welsh students and researchers with richer, more varied international experiences and align with Wales' values of social justice and global responsibility.

Finally, continued investment in Welsh Government initiatives like the Taith programme will be crucial for sustaining international mobility. Expanding and enhancing the scope of such programmes will ensure that Wales remains competitive in the global higher education landscape and continues to attract international talent, enriching both the academic and cultural environment within Welsh institutions.

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

In addition to the points raised, the Committee should consider the ways in which Welsh universities can actively contribute to the development and implementation of the Welsh Government's international strategy. Given the significant role that universities play in fostering international collaboration, research, and cultural exchange, it is crucial that the higher education sector is more deeply involved in shaping Wales' global engagement efforts.

Universities in Wales, including Cardiff University, have established extensive international networks, attracted significant international investment, and contributed to raising Wales' profile globally. Recognising the cultural, academic, and economic influence of Welsh universities on the international stage is essential for enhancing Wales' international standing. The Committee should consider ways in which the impact of these institutions can be better showcased, both within Wales and internationally. Highlighting their contributions in areas such as research on global challenges like climate change, health, and digital innovation would reinforce Wales' position as a hub of knowledge and expertise.

Moreover, the Committee should explore opportunities to leverage universities' international alumni networks. These networks can serve as valuable ambassadors for Wales, promoting its educational, cultural, and economic offerings across the globe. By fostering stronger connections with alumni who have studied in Wales, the Government can enhance its soft power and influence, creating long-lasting ties that benefit both Wales and the wider international community. Robust international student recruitment also supports this aim.

The Committee should consider ensuring the sustainability and resilience of international activities in the face of global uncertainties. The impacts of Brexit, global economic fluctuations, and changes in immigration policies pose significant challenges to Wales' international engagement. By developing a flexible and adaptive strategy that can respond to shifting geopolitical landscapes, the Welsh Government will be better equipped to protect and enhance its international relationships in the years to come.

In addition to the points raised, we recommend that the Committee consider enhancing existing mechanisms for Welsh universities to more effectively contribute to the development and implementation of the Welsh Government's international strategy. A more structured and direct route for engagement is needed to ensure that Cardiff University, as a key economic player and major

contributor to Wales' international profile, can effectively support and align with the Welsh Government's global ambitions.

Given Cardiff University's significant role—accounting for a significant proportion of the sector and with established international networks, investments, and collaborations—it is crucial that a clear channel for interaction is developed. This would enable Welsh universities to contribute meaningfully to international strategy while ensuring that their expertise, resources, and international partnerships are fully leveraged to maximise Wales' global impact.

We propose a more direct and streamlined approach to engagement, where universities can more easily identify opportunities to align with Welsh Government priorities and contribute to international initiatives. This would involve better communication, clearer coordination, and a shared understanding of how universities and the Welsh Government can work together to achieve common goals.

Moreover, it is important to recognise and highlight the significant contributions of Welsh universities to Wales' international profile. Universities like Cardiff University are leaders in global research on critical challenges, such as climate change, health innovation, and digital technologies. By showcasing these contributions more effectively, both within Wales and on the global stage, the Welsh Government can amplify Wales' position as a hub of knowledge and expertise.

The Committee should also consider ways to leverage the strong international alumni networks that Welsh universities have built over the years. These alumni can be powerful ambassadors for Wales, promoting its educational, cultural, and economic strengths globally. Strengthening connections with this network would further enhance Wales' international presence and influence.

Lastly, it is essential for the Welsh Government to adopt a flexible and adaptive approach to international relations, particularly in light of global uncertainties such as Brexit, economic fluctuations, and changes in immigration policies. By ensuring that there are responsive pathways for Welsh universities to engage with the Government's international strategy, Wales can safeguard and strengthen its global relationships, maintaining resilience in the face of shifting geopolitical landscapes.
