Urdd Gobaith Cymru - Evidence Submission
Follow-up to Ireland-Wales Relations and looking to the future, including the 2030 shared statement.

Introduction

Urdd Gobaith Cymru welcomes the Committee's continued focus on strengthening Wales-Ireland relations. As the main youth organisation promoting the Welsh language and Welsh culture, we have actively contributed to the initiatives of both countries and see significant potential to deepen the cooperation through the 2030 Shared Statement.

Ireland-Wales shared statement 2030

We welcome the 2030 Shared Statement and see a great opportunity to strengthen the focus on youth engagement. Involving young people in Wales and Ireland is essential for building cooperative bridges and friendships for future generations. Urdd Gobaith Cymru had no direct input into the formation of the statement. We believe that recognizing the contribution of initiatives such as the partnership between the Urdd and TG Lurgan, which promotes the use of the Welsh and Irish languages and shares good practice, can add value to the statement.

A. Our Current Wales–Ireland Programme

Our programmes foster pride in linguistic heritage and create meaningful friendships between Welsh and Irish young people (15-25 years old), rooting bilingualism beyond formal education.

Our International Director regularly participates in civil society engagement meetings between Wales and Ireland, contributing views on youth issues, culture and linguistic cooperation. This presence ensures that the voices of the young people of Wales are represented in strategic discussions, and creates opportunities to strengthen partnerships, share good practice, and develop joint projects that promote the Welsh and Irish languages.

1. **Partnership with TG Lurgan**
   In March 2020, Urdd Gobaith Cymru established an exciting partnership with TG Lurgan, an Irish youth organization that promotes the Irish language through contemporary music. TG Lurgan's YouTube channel is full of impressive productions that have attracted millions of viewers, making the language more attractive to young people.

From the Urdd's experience, this project has:

- Developed national and international pride and raised the status of minority languages among young people.
- Produced bilingual music videos, which attract millions of views on streaming platforms
- Introduced annual exchanges, involving over 1,000 young people across Wales and Ireland.
- Brought minority language speakers together from different communities.
- Established best practice in creating and sharing digital content.
- Normalised bilingualism in social contexts beyond formal education.

Wales–Ireland trips and exchanges since 2021

- Number of trips: 6, 4 Wales to Ireland and 2 Ireland to Wales
- Total participants: 1023 (163 from Wales, 860 from Ireland)

Quotes from participants:
"Having spent most of my teenage years during the pandemic, this was an incredible experience that means so much more than words can explain."

"This trip taught me more about the Irish language and it increased my appreciation of the Welsh language."

".We united over music, musicals, and even learned Welsh for a collaboration on Water Under the Bridge - ."

Links to Urdd and TG Lurgan co-productions (2025 production to be released)

Golau'n Dallu / Dallta ag na Solise (January 2021)

Gwenwyn / Nimhneach (April 2021)

Dŵr Dan Bont / Uisce Faoin Droichead (June 2022

Gwalia / A Bhanba, O Gymru (Ebrill 2023)

Human (April 2023)

Heno'n Ifanc / Muid Fós Óg (August 2023)

Texas Hold 'Em (August 2024)

Dog Days (August 2024)

2. **Other Voices Festival – Cardigan 2025**, a cultural project which includes an exchange between two young performers from Wales and two from Ireland, performing in Wales and Ireland.
   As part of the project the 4 came together in order to interweave traditional Welsh music with traditional Irish music. During Other Voices Festival Cardigan, the group performed in locations around the town, presenting Welsh and Irish music to a wide audience. The quartet will perform during Dingle Other Voices Festival at the beginning of December, and during St David's Day celebrations in Dublin in March 2026.

   "Had a special experience getting to know a new culture and learning about a different culture"
   "Amazing opportunities to see Welsh music and the stage. Seeing the similarities between the Welsh language and the Irish language. And the similarities in music."
   "A way of building and creating bridges between the musicians of Wales and Ireland."
   "Welsh musicians and Irish musicians can come together and listen to different music"
   "A way for people from Ireland and Wales to share music"

3. **Collaboration between the Urdd National Youth Theater and Crooked House Theater Company / Kildare Youth Theater Cymru. April and August 2025.** In April 2025, 5 young people from Wales, together with peers from Ireland, attended a residential workshop to discuss themes of identity to celebrate minority languages in a creative way. In August, 10 young people from Wales performed at a festival

celebrating minority languages, sharing work created in collaboration with a group from Ireland. Discussions are underway to invite the group from Ireland to the Urdd Eisteddfod in May 2026 and to the National Eisteddfod in August 2026 to perform together.

4. **Sharing practice – Chwarae yn Gymraeg.** On St David's Day 2023, during a visit to Galescoil Thaobh na Coille Irish-medium primary school in South Dublin in the company of the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, the Urdd's support package was presented, which is available to use in schools to encourage the use of minority languages among learners, children and young people. This initiative started in Dublin and is now an integral part of our international engagement with young people that we use in all of our international projects.

B. <u>Impact to date</u>

1. International Recognition and Respect

The partnership between the Urdd and TG Lurgan is an example of how youth led projects can flourish, evolve and contribute directly to cultural diplomacy. Over the past five years, this initiative has created unique opportunities for young people from Wales and Ireland to work together, engaging directly with over 1000 Welsh- and Irish-speaking participants. Through creative projects, cultural exchanges and digital productions, the partnership has promoted the status of minority languages, strengthened international relations, and earned millions of views on streaming platforms globally. This shows how youth projects can be a catalyst for international cooperation and promote linguistic diversity."

2. Benefits for young people

These projects have provided opportunities that contribute directly to the personal, linguistic and creative development of young people. In particular, they have:

- **Strengthened confidence in languages through practical experiences**: "The trip boosted my confidence to speak Welsh and make friends with new people."
- **Broadened cultural horizons:** "I learned a lot about the Welsh and Irish languages - it was eye-opening to see how passionate both countries are about their languages."
- **Developed creative and performing skills**: "The final concert was a highlight - performing on stage with an international group was an unforgettable experience."
- **Fostered international relations:** "Meeting other people who share the same passion for their minority language was surreal and comforting."]

More broadly, the project has:

- **Increased the status of minority languages** among young people through digital projects and musical co-productions.
- **Established collaborative networks** which strengthen cultural links in young people between Wales and Ireland.
- **Provided a platform for youth leadership** in an international context, contributing to the goals of the 2030 shared statement

3. **Digital reach.** The Urdd and TG Lurgan co-productions have attracted millions of views on YouTube and global streaming platforms. This success not only celebrates the links between young people in Wales and Ireland, but also highlights the importance of minority languages to an international audience.

4. **Press reach.** There has been considerable media coverage in Wales and Ireland on these projects. In Wales, coverage was broadcast on BBC Radio Cymru, along with editorial content on BBC Cymru Fyw, and items and interviews on Heno. In Ireland, a variety of press and broadcast media coverage was given, including a TV item on TG4, interviews on Raidió na Gaeltachta, as well as print and online coverage from organizations such as RTÉ and the *Irish Independent*.

C. <u>Looking ahead to 2030 - Key Recommendations</u>

1. Maintaining and Evolving the TG Lurgan Partnership

Continuing with an annual creative collaboration that promotes the Welsh and Irish languages among young people, building on the success of musical and digital productions that have already attracted millions of online views. In addition, expanding the initiative to include new art forms such as short film, international theater and digital content on global platforms, in order to increase the reach and status of minority languages.

2. Empowering Young People to use minority languages

Providing platforms for youth leadership, ensuring that young people are involved in shaping policies and projects that promote socialising bilingually. This includes opportunities to lead creative projects, contribute to strategic discussions, and create international networks that foster linguistic confidence and leadership skills.

3. Professional Development and Sharing Information

Facilitating staff exchanges and joint training programs between Welsh and Irish cultural institutions, sharing best practice in language use outside the classroom, managing creative projects, and developing digital strategies. This will strengthen institutional capacity and ensure that both countries benefit from joint expertise.

4. Making the most of UK–EU Youth Cooperation

Using Erasmus+, TAITH and similar schemes to expand the cultural horizons of young people through international exchanges, joint arts projects, and workshops that promote linguistic diversity. This will create opportunities to connect with wider European networks, strengthening Wales's status as an active partner in youth cooperation

In conclusion

The Urdd remains committed to working together and in partnership with TG Lurgan. Our priority is to ensure that young people continue to be at the heart of cultural and linguistic cooperation, strengthening bridges between the two countries, promoting the status of minority languages, and creating opportunities for youth leadership in an international context. Through creative projects, cultural exchanges and strategic networks, we will build on the current successes to support the Welsh Government to realize the vision set out in the 2030 shared statement.