

International Relations Monitoring Report

September 2024 – Issue 4



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1. Introduction

In March 2022, the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee (the Committee) noted its intention to conduct regular monitoring of international activity undertaken by Welsh Ministers as part of its strategy and priorities for the Sixth Senedd.

This monitoring report is intended to provide Members of the Committee with an update on key policy developments related to the Committee's international relations remit. This includes relevant statements made by the Welsh and UK governments, as well as public bodies, delivery partners and stakeholders. Relevant publications from Senedd Research will also be included in the report.

The report covers the period July-September 2024.

2. International relations

This section summarises key developments related to the Welsh Government's International Strategy and other relevant updates.

International Strategy

The Committee launched a consultation on the Welsh Government's International Strategy and accompanying action plans. The consultation closes on 4 October. The Strategy is due to end in 2025 and the Committee is considering the following issues:

- The success of the International Strategy and priorities for the Welsh Government's international relations beyond 2025;
- How the Welsh Government's priority relationships align to the Strategy's aims and objectives;
- The availability of information relating to the Welsh Government's international activities and delivery of the Strategy;
- The Welsh Government's future approach to Wales's international relations; and
- How the Welsh Government's international relations activity is resourced.

In August, the former First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, wrote to the Committee with further information on the topics covered during the international relations annual scrutiny session, which took place on 19 June. The letter discusses how the International Strategy is monitored and the former First Minister said he had "asked officials to move away from report writing and focus on delivering our activity". However, he stated Welsh Government officials are undertaking a review of progress as part of an International Strategy refresh. He said officials would provide a separate briefing to the Committee on the deliverables as part of the refresh work.

Further updates from this letter have been included under the relevant section of this report.

Ministerial responsibilities

Following the Welsh Government cabinet reshuffle in September, the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, retains responsibility for “international relations including overseas network and Wales and Africa Wales and Europe”. The First Minister also retains responsibility for national security, including counter-terrorism and cyber security, and for the Ministerial Code which contains international obligations duties.

Rebecca Evans MS has been appointed Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning and has responsibility for international trade.

International relations budget

In August, the Welsh Government responded to an Freedom of Information request which asked for a breakdown of the following individual budget lines:

- international engagement;
- overseas network; and
- overseas operations.

The response stated the request would have required the retrieval of individual transactions that made up the budget spend for 2023-24. It said the “budget, which includes spend across our overseas network, has returned 9664 individual transactions”. The Welsh Government said the associated costs of the work would be over the appropriate limit as set out in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004.

In his letter to the Committee, following the 19 June international relations scrutiny session, the Former First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, addresses the cuts to the international relations budget. He said spend had to be “refocussed and reprioritised” and alternative approaches are being explored, saying diaspora engagement has been integrated into the activities of the overseas offices. The Welsh Government’s 2024-25 Final Budget for the International Relations BEL has been reduced by 3.5% compared to Final Budget 2023-24 (from £8.383m to £8.093m).

Cardiff Airport

In August, the Committee wrote to the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, and the former Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates MS, following the announcement that the Welsh Government was “seeking

regulatory approval for a package up to a maximum of £206m across a ten-year period” to invest in Cardiff Airport. Published in July, the Welsh Government’s written statement said routes will be developed to countries identified under the Welsh Government’s International Strategy.

The Committee’s letter asks questions on how the investment would help to deliver the International Strategy’s core aims, the role of the overseas offices in the investment decision and budgetary implications.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

In July, the Welsh Government responded to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations Report 2023, which was published in June. The UN’s report makes around 200 recommendations, addressed to the UK Government but “where the relevant mandates fall under their jurisdiction, to the governments of the devolved administrations”. The Welsh Government’s response outlines the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child across a range of areas including health, education and civil rights, including the abolition of the defence of reasonable punishment and the Healthy Child Wales programme.

Global Wales

In August, Global Wales awarded funding to 22 international partnership projects. The awards totalled over £100,000 between seven universities and colleges and will support projects with partners in the USA, Canada, India and Vietnam. The Partnership Fund aims to provide an opportunity for higher education and further education institutions in Wales to:

develop sustainable, long-term relationships with international partners by first working together on a short-term, outcomes-driven projects of mutual interest

3. Europe

This section summarises the latest news relating to Europe, and lists important updates.

UK-EU relationship reset

The Prime Minister, Keir Starmer MP, hosted the fourth European Political Community summit at Blenheim Palace in July and reiterated his aim to “reset” the UK-EU relationship. The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, David Lammy MP, undertook visits to Germany, Poland and Sweden in July, where he discussed proposals for a EU-UK security pact.

The Minister for European Union Relations, Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, also visited Brussels in July to meet with former European Commission Executive, Vice President Maroš Šefčovič. The UK Government’s accompanying press release said the meeting:

aims to set the ground for further discussions between the UK and EU as the UK seeks to reset its relationship with the bloc and build closer cooperation on shared issues.

Maroš Šefčovič said he was looking forward:

to discuss ways to strengthen our cooperation, while making the most of our existing agreements that form the cornerstone of our partnership.

In July, the Guardian reported that the UK and EU are expected to host their first summit in spring 2025. The report says the Prime Minister would meet with the leaders of the European Commissions and Council, rather than heads of the EU27. The EU hosts similar summits with other non-EU states but has no equivalent meeting with the UK.

UK-Germany cooperation

In August, Prime Minister, Keir Starmer MP, met with German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, and Germany’s President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, during a trip to Berlin. The UK Government said the visit would:

launch negotiations on a new bilateral treaty, which is expected to boost business and trade, deepen defence and security cooperation, and increase joint action on illegal migration.

It is expected that the Prime Minister's negotiating team will "spend the next six months agreeing the new treaty, with both sides wanting to agree the new partnership in early 2025".

Nils Schmid, the foreign affairs spokesman for Germany's Social Democratic Party, spoke to the BBC, saying:

There is a constant push by the German government to bring the UK closer to Europe [...] And then, of course, there's also the idea of not only preparing the ground for a EU-UK agreement, but also to strengthen the bilateral ties between Germany and Great Britain.

He said a youth mobility scheme was "a major feature of our wish list". However, the new UK Government has previously rejected EU proposals for a youth mobility scheme. The Independent reported that the UK Government also rejected calls for a scheme with Spain, repeating its commitment not to take the UK back into the single market, customs union or to restore freedom of movement.

European Parliament elections

The European Parliament elections were held between the 6-9 June. The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) group remains the largest political group with 188 seats. The Parliament's website has a full breakdown of the results.

The newly established group, Patriots of Europe, is the third largest party, with 84 MEPs. The group was launched after Fidez, the party of the Hungarian President Victor Orbán, left the EPP prior to the election, alongside Austria's Freedom party and the Czech Republic's ANO. A number of other parties joined the group, including France's National Rally and Italy's Lega. The Social and Democrats remain the second largest group with 136 seats.

In July, Ursula von der Leyen was elected for a second term as the European Commission President-elect. The vote was held by secret paper ballot and 401 MEPs voted in favour, 284 against, and 22 cast blank or invalid votes. In September, the European Commission announced the list of Commissioners-designate, alongside their portfolios. In detailed mission letters President, Maroš Šefčovič MEP, has been announced as Commissioner-designate for Trade and Economic Security. He will be the Commission's lead on relations with the UK. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, will have responsibility for strengthening foreign and security policy cooperation with the UK. Glenn Micallef was announced as the Commissioner-designate for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport. These Commissioners will be

subject to confirmation hearings in the European Parliament before a final vote is held to approve the Commission as a whole.

Roberta Metsola MEP, was also [elected for a second term](#) as the Parliament's President.

Youth mobility and touring artists

The former co-chairs of the UK-EU Partnership Council [responded](#) to a recommendation from the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly on youth mobility and student exchanges, school trips and touring artists. The former European Commission Executive Vice-President, Maroš Šefčovič, and former Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, Rt Hon Lord David Cameron, were the co-chairs at the time.

On youth mobility and student exchanges, they highlighted that an UK-EU agreement would be “a matter for the Parties, rather than for the Partnership Council itself” and also noted the UK's exploration of bilateral agreements with “international partners”. The response reflects the divergent positions of the UK and the EU on student exchanges.

On touring artists, the response said that changes to current rules would require amendments to the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which would “be a matter for the Parties to decide”. It agreed with the PPA, that clear information is required on this issue.

On school trips, the response notes that entry requirements are a matter for domestic legislation in the EU, its Members States and the UK. It summarises their differences. It also summarises the UK's agreement with France to ease travel for school groups.

Senedd Research has also published an article on the [next steps for youth mobility between the UK and the EU](#).

EU border checks

In August, the [BBC reported](#) that the UK Government has provided £10.5m to prepare for the EU's digital Entry/Exit System (EES) due to start [on 10 November](#) (with a contingency of delaying it one week to 17 November). The scheme applies to non-EU nationals “entering a European country using the EES for a short stay” of up to 90 days in a 180-day period. It will include the registration of fingerprints and a photo. The funding is intended to help reduce queues and will provide the technology required to complete the checks. There is [further information](#) on the European Union website.

European Scrutiny Committee

Following the UK's general election in July, the House of Commons decided not to re-establish the European Scrutiny Committee. A [press release](#), published in August, said “EU schemes, laws and proposals that could have an impact on the UK will now fall under the remit of the relevant departmental or other committees”.

The Institute for Government [published an article](#) setting out its view that the House of Commons is wrong not to establish a dedicated committee on UK-EU issues.

Wales-Ireland relations

The PEACEPLUS programme [announced £423,000](#) for the Developing Irish Sea Cooperation (DISC) project. The funding has been awarded to the DISC project under the PEACEPLUS investment theme ‘Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration’. This is aimed at “capitalising on working relationships between Northern Ireland and Ireland, as well as growing East-West links”. Agile Cymru [responded on X](#), saying it would “work with colleagues across the Irish Sea region to identify new co-operation opportunities”.

The Committee and the [Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee](#) have previously considered the UK-Ireland - European Commission PEACEPLUS programme in 2023. In [its report on Wales-Ireland relations](#), published in October 2023, the Committee referenced evidence from the former First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS on engagement with the programme:

Partners in Wales are being kept informed of potential opportunities to engage with PEACE Plus and provided with advice, guidance and support through Agile Cymru.

Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)

In August, four committees [launched a call for evidence](#) on how the TCA is working in Wales and to ensure a Welsh perspective is reflected as part of the implementation review. The closing date for written submissions is 1 November. The UK and EU must review the implementation of the TCA by 2026 and discussions are likely to take place throughout 2025. The Committees involved are:

- Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee;
- Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee;
- Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee; and
- Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee.

German-British Cultural Commission

The Welsh Government’s [Wales in Germany X account](#) highlighted that Taith and Global Wales had been mentioned during a meeting of the German-British Cultural Commission in London, which was held in May. The [German-British Cultural Commission](#) “sets the

agenda for joint cultural cooperation”, and held an inaugural meeting in April 2023 after its reinstatement, having not held a meeting since 1993.

The cooperation between Wales and Baden-Württemberg was also noted. In December 2023, the Committee wrote to the Welsh Government “to understand why so little detail has been published” regarding the Shared Statement of Cooperation between the Welsh Government and the Government of Baden-Württemberg. The Welsh Government responded in January, saying:

Our agreement with the B-W government does not follow a detailed or formal action plan. Instead, we have agreed to use our Statement as a platform to respond to opportunities as they arise across six priority areas:

I. Bilateral engagement

II. Trade and Entrepreneurship

III. Science and Research

IV. Education and Youth

V. Culture and Communities

VI. Environment and Climate Protection

International circular economy event

The Welsh Government announced it will co-host the 2024 European Circular Economy Hotspot in Cardiff, alongside Climate Action Wales. The event is being held on 7-9 October.

This is a paid and international event which aims to share circular economy solutions from the public and private sector, and communities. The event involves a conference, with speakers including Derek Walker, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and a showcase of how younger people are “shaping the circular economy in Wales”.

UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The former UK Minister for Arts and Heritage and Libraries, Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay, met with UNESCO’s Director-General Audrey Azoulay to mark the UK’s ratification of the Convention in April. The Convention was effective as 7 June. There is no further update on the UK Government’s public consultation on the Convention’s initial implementation.

4. Written questions

This section provides a list of relevant written questions and Welsh Government responses during July-September.

International relations

Q. Delyth Jewell MS (tabled on 24/07/2024): What assessment has the Welsh Government made of the economic impact on Wales from being removed from the European single market and customs union?

A. Former Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Transport and North Wales – Ken Skates MS (answered on 05/08/2024): I will write to you with a substantive response and a copy of the letter will be published on the internet.

Q. Sam Rowlands MS (tabled on 18/07/2024): What overseas trips do Welsh Government Ministers and officials have planned for the remainder of 2024?

A. Former First Minister – Vaughan Gething MS (answered on 30/07/2024): We do not publish advance notification of Welsh Government travel as it increases the security risk and costs to the public purse. Details of ministerial visits continue to be published once travel has taken place in line with the Ministerial code.

UN Convention of the Rights of the Child

Q. Rhys ab Owen MS (tabled on 31/07/2024): What consideration has the Welsh Government given to fully enshrining the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child into Welsh law, similar to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 in Scotland?

A. Former Minister for Mental Health and Early Years – Sarah Murphy MS (answered on 05/08/2024): Wales was the first country in the UK to enshrine children's rights in law through The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. The measure requires that Welsh Ministers must pay 'due regard' to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) when exercising any of their functions.

Q. Rhys ab Owen MS (tabled on 31/07/2024): Will the Cabinet Secretary be expanding the eligibility criteria for the Childcare Offer and Flying Start childcare, as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's observations in their report from the 2nd June 2023?

A. Former Minister for Mental Health and Early Years – Sarah Murphy MS (answered on 06/08/2024): We have already set out our plans for childcare in Wales. The Welsh Government provides up to 30 hours of Early Education and funded childcare for 3 and 4 year olds under the Childcare Offer for Wales. From September 2022, the Welsh Government expanded this offer to include parents in education and training, supporting the commitment made in our Programme for Government. In the first year, this expansion saw 675 additional families supported through the Offer.

We are making excellent progress in extending the eligibility of Flying Start childcare by rolling out high-quality childcare to two-year-olds across Wales through our Flying Start

programme. This is a phased roll-out, starting with our areas of greatest deprivation and takes account of the capacity within the childcare sector across Wales.

During 2023-24 and 2024-25 we are investing £46m in expanding Flying Start childcare to support long-term, positive impacts on the lives of those children and families across Wales facing the greatest challenges. We expect to support more than 9,500 additional two-year-olds across Wales to access quality Flying Start childcare during phase 2 (2023-24 and 2024-25) and we are well on track to deliver that.

Whilst our Flying Start programme is geographically targeted, the Outreach element of the programme provides a degree of flexibility and enables services to be delivered to individual children and families living with assessed needs outside of recognised Flying Start areas.

Focusing resources on our most disadvantaged communities, in the first instance, ensures that support reaches families in greatest need at the earliest opportunity. Our ambition remains for Flying Start childcare services to be available for all two-year-olds in Wales. We are working with the sector to gradually build capacity to ensure that any increase to provision is sustainable.

Tourism

Q. Janet Finch Saunders MS (tabled on 31/07/2024): What discussions has the Cabinet Secretary had with the Scottish Government about the implementation of their tourist levy, and the lessons Wales can learn?

A. Former Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Cabinet Office – Rebecca Evans MS (answered on 06/08/2024): I can confirm that I have discussed the visitor levy with my counterpart in the Scottish Government, and that we have agreed for officials to work closely together to share knowledge and experience.

Officials have been meeting regularly since 2021 with officials in Scottish Government to discuss the visitor levy, share learnings and understand the approach taken in Scotland.

Similarly, the visitor levy has been discussed by officials from the Welsh Revenue Authority in their routine conversations with the Scottish Government, Revenue Scotland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

Trade and ports

Q. Paul Davies MS (tabled on 19/07/2024): Will the Cabinet Secretary provide an update on the development of the Celtic Freeport?

A. Former Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Transport and North Wales – Ken Skates MS (answered on 26/07/2024): The Celtic Freeport's Outline Business Case (OBC) was submitted in January 2024, following which a joint assessment was carried out by the UK Government and Welsh Government. Feedback was provided to the Freeport consortium, who resubmitted their OBC in April to address areas requiring improvement.

The general election delayed the final sign-off of the OBC by both governments and the subsequent legislative processes for designation of tax sites. We hope to restart this process with the new UK Government soon, following which the Freeport will be formally asked to produce a Full Business Case (FBC). Agreement of the FBC is expected to lead to

the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding and the release of up to £25m seed capital.

Q. Sam Rowlands MS (tabled on 18/07/2024): Will the Cabinet Secretary provide a list of members of the trade policy advisory group?

A. Former Secretary for the Economy, Transport and North Wales – Ken Skates MS (answered on 26/07/2024): The Trade Policy Advisory Group advises the Welsh Government on trade policy matters. The core membership of the Trade Policy Advisory Group is published on our website and includes:

- ACCA Cymru Wales
- Aerospace Wales
- Cardiff University
- CBI Wales
- Chamber Wales
- Fair Trade Wales
- FinTech Wales
- Food and Drink Industry Board Wales
- FSB Wales
- Hybu Cig Cymru
- Institute of Export and International Trade
- Make UK
- MediWales
- Public Health Wales
- RDP Law
- TUC Cymru
- Unite the Union
- Welsh Automotive Forum
- Women Equality Network Wales

Q. Andrew RT Davies MS (tabled on 15/07/2024): Does the Cabinet Secretary agree with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy that the situation to date regarding negotiations with Tata Steel to save jobs in Port Talbot is unmovable?

A. Former First Minister- Vaughan Gething MS (answered on 26/07/2024): Both the Welsh and UK Government understand Tata Steel's position on the situation at Port Talbot and will work collaboratively with a single focus to support our steel industry and affected communities, helping protect jobs and creating opportunities for new employment.

Q. Andrew RT Davies MS (tabled on 15/07/2024): What assurances will the Cabinet Secretary provide that the benefits of Wales's Freeports won't be in doubt in light of the UK Government's decision to ban North Sea oil drilling?

A. Former Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Transport and North Wales -Ken Skates MS (answered on 22/07/2024): We are looking forward to working with the new UK Government on the development of Wales's Freeports with a focus on green energy that will create jobs and bring investment to Anglesey, Neath-Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, and Wales as a whole.

Q. Gareth Davies MS (tabled on 21/06/2024): How is the Welsh Government collaborating with UK and international authorities to better track the entry and exit of non-Welsh fishing vessels from Welsh inshore waters?

A. Former Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs – Huw Irranca Davies (answered on 01/07/2024): The Welsh Fisheries Monitoring Centre (WFMC) based at Milford Haven monitors all fishing activity within the Welsh zone, and works closely with other Fisheries Administrations in the UK, and the Marine Management Organisation, as well as with other Flag States.

Every commercial fishing vessel operating within the UK is subject to a fishing licence regime which also extends to foreign vessels. There are no third country vessels licenced to fish within the Welsh inshore (6 nautical mile (nm)) limit.

Non-Welsh (UK) vessels which are allowed within the 6nm limit are subjected to the same restrictions around Wales as the Welsh fleet. As such, they are monitored daily as above and are also required to have fitted a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) unit which records the vessel's position. This requirement extends to the entire Welsh zone and in addition to its position, the speed, course and date / time stamp must also be included.

Catch and VMS data from all UK vessels is received automatically to the shared with the UK fisheries data hub. Data exchange systems are in place to send and receive data from third country vessels.

Any vessel not fishing but transiting the Welsh zone, and which might include entry and exit of the inshore 6nm limit, is closely monitored and checked as above.

Education

Q. Sian Gwenllïan MS (tabled on 09/07/2024): Further to [WQ93010](#), will the Cabinet Secretary explain why applications from international students were not allowed? (WQ93010 relates to the number of students starting courses at Bangor Medical School and the number of those from Wales, the UK and internationally.)

A. Former Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care – Eluned Morgan MS (answered on 11/07/2024): In my response to WQ93010, I advised that no international student applications were permitted, therefore no international students have been allowed to apply.

5. Oral questions

This section provides a list of all relevant oral questions and responses.

Health

Q. Mike Hedges MS (tabled on 27/06/2024): Will the First Minister make a statement on the contribution of people from outside Great Britain working in the NHS and social care sector in Wales?

A. *Former First Minister- Vaughan Gething MS* (answered on 02/07/2024: I'm very proud to recognise that we greatly value the contribution of our international workforce in Wales today, but also from the very history, from the start of our national health service, which celebrates yet another birthday on 5 July, and I hope it has an early birthday present with a change in Government at a UK level. The vital work that our workforce do in health and social care, whilst recognising any recruitment from overseas, must be ethical and not to the detriment of services in the countries from which we are recruiting. (Full discussion can be found in the transcript – Paragraph 45)

6. Welsh Government ministerial outward/inward visits: July- August

This section outlines visits undertaken by Welsh Government ministers and incoming official visitors to Wales. The Committee is provided with monthly lists of these engagements from Welsh Government, in addition to its own monitoring.

No visits were undertaken during July and August