

International Relations Monitoring Report

March 2025 – Issue 6



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.

It also includes relevant information from the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister (CfSFM) session, which took place in December 2024. The session's focus was 'Wales and the World'.

The report covers the period January – March 2025.

2. International relations

2.1. International delivery plan

This section outlines updates on the Welsh Government's international delivery plan, which was announced in November 2024 by First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS. It was stated that the delivery plan would be published in early 2025.

- During the CfSFM in December, the First Minister confirmed the International Strategy will not undergo a refresh, as previously advised. She said:

What I've suggested to the team now is that we focus on a delivery plan, rather than a complete refresh, when, at most, it was only going to be an extension for a year.

- On this Committee's role in developing the delivery plan, the First Minister said "I'd see the role of the [Culture] committee is in scrutinising the delivery itself". The former First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, said he would look to engage the Committee should the Strategy be refreshed during an annual international relations scrutiny session in June 2024.
- In January 2025, the First Minister responded to a letter from this Committee which requested further information following the CfSFM session. In the response, she confirmed the delivery plan would be shared with this Committee in the "coming weeks". This timeframe has since changed as the First Minister's response to this Committee's report on the Draft Budget 2025-26 said "we will launch the International Delivery Plan by the end of the current financial year".

2.2. Wales and Japan 2025

This section outlines updates on the Wales and Japan initiative, which is the latest in the promotional 'Wales in' years.

- In January, the First Minister launched 'Wales and Japan', which aims to "stimulate new economic and cultural partnerships between the two nations". A £150,000 Japan Culture Fund will be launched shortly and will be managed by Wales Arts International.

- During [the CfSFM session](#), an official present highlighted that a Memorandum of Understanding had been signed between the advanced manufacturing research centre in North Wales and Japan Marine United.

2.3. Wales-US relations

This section outlines recent developments in UK-US relations since President Donald Trump's inauguration in November 2024. For further information, Senedd Research [published an article](#) on Wales-US trade, which includes the latest Welsh Government view on the US as a trading partner and potential tariffs.

- In February 2025, Prime Minister Keir Starmer MP, [met with President Trump](#). President Trump suggested the possibility of a “real trade deal” with the UK where “tariffs wouldn’t be necessary”. The Prime Minister said the UK and US would begin work on an agreement centred on the potential of artificial intelligence.
- The First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, [congratulated President Trump](#) on his inauguration in November 2024. In February, she confirmed she had not spoken directly to President Trump [in response to a written question](#) from Andrew RT Davies MS.
- In February, the First Minister provided a breakdown of staff and office costs for the Welsh Government's US offices in response [to a written question](#) from Russell George MS. The full response can be seen in the link provided.

2.4. Overseas offices

Year	Cost
2019-20	£5.515m
2020-21	£4.475m
2021-22	£4.642m
2022-23	£5.530m
2023-24	£4.684m
2024-25	£4.684m

In [response to a written question](#) from Darren Millar MS, the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, provided a breakdown of Welsh Government overseas offices and their staff. She confirmed there are 20 offices, with 42 staff.

In response to another written question from Darren Millar MS, the First Minister provided an annual breakdown of the costs of running the overseas offices (see figures opposite). She stated that individual office costs are no longer available due to a “change in the way in which the Welsh Government is now charged by the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office for co-location within its offices overseas”.

2.5. Wales and Africa

This section outlines developments in relation to the Wales and Africa Programme.

- In January, the Welsh Government published a response to a freedom of information request on the Wales and Africa Programme. The request was for the full list of projects funded by the Wales and Africa Grant Scheme and any assessment of their effectiveness. The Welsh Government stated that the information is not held by them. They signposted the correspondent to the main page of the WCVA’s website which does not present the information.
- In February, the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee notified this Committee of a new international treaty that had been laid in the UK Parliament to make amendments to the Agreement establishing the African Development Fund. The amendments will allow the Fund to access international capital markets and raise non-concessional financing for the 37 poorest countries in Africa by leveraging existing equity. The Committee has agreed to write to the UK and Welsh Governments to request further information.
- In February, the Minister for Development, Anneliese Dodds MP, resigned over cuts to Overseas Development Assistance. It was announced that the budget would be reduced from 0.5% of Gross National Income to 0.3% in 2027. The Welsh Government’s international development budget has also been subject to a 23.6% cut for this year’s budget cycle. The cut led to aspects of Wales and Africa spending being paused and the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, confirms in her response to the Committee’s report on the Draft Budget that the funding hasn’t been restored.

2.6. Ukraine

This section outlines developments in the Senedd in relation to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. For further information, Senedd Research published an article

marking the third anniversary of the war, presenting the latest statistics on refugees and the war's impact on Wales's trade with Ukraine and Russia.

- In March, the First Minister issued a written statement on Ukraine. She reiterated Wales' support during its ongoing war with Russia and stated that:

Let me be clear, there can be no justification for the invasion of Ukraine, and we must stand full square behind President Zelenskyy and the people of Ukraine.

2.7. Higher education

Global Wales announced funding to support Welsh universities and colleges to develop sustainable, long-term relationships with international partners. New projects will be eligible for up to £4000, while extensions to existing projects will be eligible for up to £3000. This will be focused on Global Wales' priority regions:

- USA;
- Canada;
- Vietnam;
- Karnataka, India; and
- Telangana, India.

2.8. Soft power

The UK Government launched the UK Soft Power Council on 15 January. It has 26 members and is an advisory board to the UK Government. This section provides an outline of its remit and membership.

- The Council's remit includes:
 - advise the UK Government on a new soft power strategy;
 - advise on soft power campaigns globally; and
 - drive a systematic approach to the global foreign policy, cultural and sporting calendars.
- The UK Government stated that council members had been invited based on their "expertise in soft power sectors". They were also invited

based on the UK's foreign policy priorities including growth, security, Europe, migration, climate and nature, and development.

- Out of the 26 members, one is from a Welsh organisation, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson from Sport Wales.

3. Europe

3.1. UK-EU reset

This section outlines recent developments in the UK-EU relationship reset.

- Politico reported that the UK will host a Brexit summit on 19 May to discuss plans to reset the UK's relationship with the EU. European Council President, António Costa, was quoted as saying the summit would focus on devising "the closest relationship it will be possible to build together."
- In January, the UK Government appointed Michael Ellam as Second Permanent Secretary post in the Cabinet Office who will be "leading the Government's relationship with the EU".
- During the CfSFM session, First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, said she had met with Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations, Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, and had spoken to him about the Welsh Government's priorities for the UK-EU reset. She listed:
 - The sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) veterinary agreement;
 - Mutual recognition of professional qualifications;
 - Improved mobility of workers to provide services; and
 - Rejoining EU programmes, such as Erasmus.
- The First Minister acknowledged that resetting the relationship would not "be easy to turn around" but that the "strong relationship" that the Welsh Government has with the Irish Government is helpful "in giving us a sense of how the European Union is feeling". The First Minister said she has been clear with the UK Government that they want "as close a relationship as we can get". She also mentioned that Minister of State for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty MP, was another helpful point of contact in the UK Government.

3.2. Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)

This section outlines developments in relation to the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and its upcoming implementation review.

- In the follow-up letter to the CfSFM session which was sent to the Committee in January, the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, outlined nine priorities for the upcoming TCA implementation review. These include:
 1. The need for a veterinary and plant health (SPS) agreement;
 2. Addressing issues relating to mobility of workers and provision of services;
 3. The need for improved arrangements on the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications;
 4. Exploring options to re-join EU programmes such as Erasmus and Creative Europe;
 5. Ensuring retention of EU Data Adequacy for Welsh businesses trading with the EU;
 6. Seeking Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs), particularly on conformity assessments to reduce trade friction;
 7. Addressing export issues around Live Bivalve Molluscs;
 8. Discussions around rules of origin to enable businesses to use increased supply chains and trade tariff free; and
 9. Effective electricity trading arrangements.
- The constitutive meeting of the European Parliament's Delegation to the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly took place on 3 October 2024. During the meeting, the Delegation elected Sandro Gozi as Chair, and Klára Dobrev as first Vice-Chair and Mika Aaltola as second Vice-Chair. In December 2024, Prime Minister, Keir Starmer MP, announced the membership of the UK delegation which includes Baroness Deborah Bull, who gave evidence to this Committee's inquiry on Culture and the new relationship with the EU.

3.3. Wales-Ireland relations

This section provides updates relating to developments in the Wales-Ireland relationship, following the Committee's inquiry on Wales-Ireland relations.

- The British-Irish Council Summit was held on 6 December 2024 in Edinburgh. The meeting focused on the theme of 'financing a just

transition". The meeting was referenced by the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, during Plenary on 10 December, where she said she:

took the opportunity [...] in the British-Irish Council, to share my reflections in particular on the situation in Palestine, with the Prime Minister and other leaders, especially in relation to Palestine, and also the Trump presidency.

- The Welsh Government has issued regular statements on cooperation with the Irish Government in response to the closure of Holyhead Port in December 2024. The Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee took evidence on the closure on 6 March.

4. Written Questions

This section provides a list of relevant written questions and Welsh Government responses.

Question	Response
Will the First Minister confirm how much was spent on flights for Welsh Government Ministers over the last calendar year? <i>(Darren Millar, tabled on 08/01/2025)</i>	The total cost of flights (internal and external) for 2024 is £14,973.81. Further details on overseas travel by Ministers will be published in line with the Ministerial code following the end of the financial year. <i>(First Minister, responded on 20/01/2025)</i>
Further to WQ95407 (above), will the First Minister confirm how much has been spent on flights for Welsh Government Ministers since May 2021? <i>(Darren Millar, tabled on 17/01/2025)</i>	I will write to you with a substantive response and a copy of the letter will be published on the internet. <i>(First Minister, responded on 30/01/2025)</i>
What assessment has the Welsh Government made of the effectiveness of its international offices? <i>(Sam Rowlands, tabled on 05/02/2025)</i>	Our overseas offices support the delivery of our International Strategy and Actions Plans. An annual report provides highlights of the activity undertaken across the network throughout the year, including activity to promote Wales as a destination for inward investment as well as the goods and services of Welsh exporters to potential customers. <i>(First Minister, responded on 10/02/2025)</i>
What assessment has the Welsh Government made of the working relationship between Welsh Government international offices and the relevant United Kingdom embassies? <i>(Sam Rowlands, tabled on 05/02/2025)</i>	Above answer is repeated.
Will the First Minister provide a list of meetings and engagements she and Welsh Government officials had at this month's British-Irish Council? <i>(Sam Rowlands, tabled on 06/12/2024)</i>	In line with established practices and reflecting the Inter-Institutional Relations Agreement between the Welsh Government and Senedd Cymru. I will be issuing a Written Statement in the new year on intergovernmental engagement at the British-Irish Council in Edinburgh on 5 and 6 December.

	<i>(First Minister, responded on 18/12/2024)</i>
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5. Welsh Government ministerial outward/inward visits: November- December

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.

Minister/Guest	Location	Purpose of Visit	Date
Indian High Commissioner	Wales	The Indian High Commissioner visited Wales to take part in Diwali celebrations in Swansea and Cardiff. During the visit the High Commissioner met with the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, to discuss the Year of Wales in India, growth in trade, the health and care sector, education and the Taith programme.	7 Nov
President of the Regional Council of Brittany	Wales	The President of Brittany visited Wales to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Wales-Brittany Memorandum of Understanding. The First Minister and the President held bilateral talks and discussed the Celtic Forum, Port Collaboration, Cyber collaboration and the Welsh Language. The Deputy First Minister co-hosted a reception with the President at Cardiff Castle.	12 Nov
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning	Germany	The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning, Rebecca Evans MS, visited Dusseldorf for the Medica trade fair. The visit also included a meeting with British Consul-General and German Investment company WEPA.	10 Nov

First Minister	London	The First Minister travelled to London to host a reception with the London-based Diplomatic Corp. She outlined priority areas for Wales and the role that international engagement will play in achieving them. While in London the First Minister also held separate bi-lateral meetings with the Ambassador for Japan, the High Commissioner for Canada and the High Commissioner for Australia.	21 Nov
UK-Canada Colloquium 2024	Wales	Between 6-8 December Wales hosted the UK-Canada Colloquium. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Mark Drakeford MS, took part in a panel session and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Jeremy Miles MS, addressed the Colloquium at a reception.	6 Dec