# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **St David’s Day Ministerial Overseas Visits** |
| **DATE**  | **23 March 2023** |
| **BY** | **First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS**  |

The Minister for Health and Social Services, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and I recently undertook overseas visits to Copenhagen, Dublin and Brussels respectively. We had a series of engagements to promote Wales and celebrate St. David’s Day with our international partners.

The Minister for Health and Social Services undertook a two-day visit to Copenhagen following an invitation to participate in the World Health Organization (WHO) Europe Region’s High-Level Forum on Health in the Well-Being Economy. This invitation was the result of ongoing cooperation between Wales and the WHO, based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Welsh Government and the WHO Europe Region in 2020.

At the Forum, the Minister raised Wales’s profile through discussing the Welsh Government’s vision of creating an anti-racist Wales, making Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe, and sharing unique Welsh approaches to embedding health in all policies. This included promoting our ground-breaking Well-being of Future Generations Act and the forthcoming Health Impact Assessment Regulations.

During the event, the Minister met with the Prime Minister of Iceland and discussed common challenges face by Wales and Iceland in recovering from COVID-19, as well as areas for possible future collaboration. She also met with Dr Hans-Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, to discuss progress in delivering the Memorandum of Understanding and opportunities for future collaboration.

As the visit coincided with St. David’s Day, the Minister co-hosted a reception with the UK Ambassador to Denmark to promote Wales abroad and strengthen links between the Welsh diaspora living and working in Denmark.

The Minister for Education and Welsh Language visited Dublin for a two-day visit which also coincided with a Welsh Government multi-sector Export Market Visit to Ireland. Nine exporters from across a diverse range of sectors, including manufacturing, tech, financial and professional services and life sciences travelled to Ireland to promote trade between Wales and Ireland. To support further collaboration the Minister hosted a business networking reception for the Welsh companies, potential Irish buyers and wider ecosystem.

During his visit, the Minister undertook a series of engagements, some of which followed up on outcomes from the second Ireland-Wales ministerial forum, strengthening our relationship as set out in the Ireland-Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action plan which has Education and Research as one of its six priority areas of collaboration.

The Minister met with the Irish Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris TD. He also met senior representatives from Irish higher and further education institutions, including University College Dublin (UCD) to discuss links between UCD and Welsh universities. The Minister visited the Adapt Centre at Trinity College Dublin to learn about the Irish Government’s new Digital Plan for Irish which was launched in December 2022 and the work being undertaken by Trinity College Dublin to support the rollout of the plan. The visit was also an opportunity to outline the work being done by Welsh universities to develop language technology. As well as a meeting with the Royal Irish Academy to discuss future research collaboration opportunities with the Learned Society of Wales.

The Minister visited Irish-language school, Gaelscoil Thaobh na Coille, to meet pupils who were participating in the Urdd’s ‘Chwarae yn Gymraeg’ workshop. The Urdd has a three-year partnership programme in place with Irish language organisation, Coláiste Lurgan, to share learning and best practice in digital technology. The workshop was the first of its kind to take place in Europe and an opportunity to forge further close working relationships in Ireland through the Welsh language.

The Welsh and Irish languages were also celebrated at an event for film and TV production held at Windmill Lane where the Minister gave a keynote address.

The Minister hosted a reception to celebrate St. David’s Day where he discussed the importance of language, culture and identity. The reception had more than 140 guests from across government, industry, education and culture as well as the Welsh diaspora community. The reception was an opportunity to reaffirm the Welsh Government’s International priorities and our commitments within the Ireland Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan.

On 1 March, I travelled to Brussels to celebrate St. David’s Day. This was an opportunity to demonstrate Wales’ commitment as a European nation and our ongoing engagement with our European partners. This was my fifth St. David’s Day in Brussels out of the last six years.

My first engagement was at the European Policy Centre where I spoke about Wales' pioneering Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. I had the opportunity to outline Wales’ continued engagement with Europe, with a focus on being a globally responsible nation, and then take questions from the audience which was made up of stakeholders from the EU policy-making community. We covered topics including Taith, basic income, the climate emergency, and Wales’ commitment to future generations.

I also had positive meetings with the European Parliament to discuss our approach to engaging with European partners on shared policy interests, as well as a series of engagements with political representatives. These included the UK Ambassador to the EU, where we discussed the UK-EU relationship, in particular the recent developments around the Windsor Framework, the Irish Permanent Representative to the EU to discuss the Ireland-Wales Shared Statement, and the Minister-President of Flanders to talk about the ongoing work to develop a Memorandum of Understanding between Wales and Flanders.

On the evening of 1 March, I hosted a reception to celebrate St. David’s Day at the UK Ambassador’s Residence in Brussels. More than 250 guests were invited, and notable attendees included the Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to the EU from Norway, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and New Zealand as well as many MEPs. I was also delighted to be able to welcome representatives from our partners in the regional governments of Brittany, Québec and the Basque Country.

In addition to overseas travel by Welsh Ministers, events to mark St. David’s Day took place across the USA, Canada, China, Japan, India, the Middle East and Europe, led by the offices in our overseas network. We supported Wales Week in London through a variety of events and delivered an international marketing campaign with a focus on our values and a celebration of Wales, retargeting audiences introduced to Wales through previous campaigns such as the FIFA and Hockey World Cups. I was delighted that our international partners also marked St. David’s Day. The US Ambassador to the UK hosted a reception which was attended by the Minister for Finance. The French Embassy hosted a reception as part of Wales in France 2023 and the Swiss Ambassador marked St David's Day with a reception focusing on language, both supported by the Welsh Government.