



Delyth Jewell MS
Chair
Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport
and International Relations Committee
Senedd Cymru

16 January 2024

Dear Delyth

I would like to thank the members of the Committee for their '*International Relations Annual Report 2022-23*' following the conclusion of their inquiry into our international relations activity.

I have set out my response to the report's individual recommendations below.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD

Detailed Responses to the Committee's Recommendations

Recommendation 1

We repeat our request and reiterate our statements made during the previous draft budget, that more detailed information is provided to the Committee to assist its scrutiny. This should include details of the outcomes and outputs that will be delivered in draft budget allocations to support the Welsh Government's international relations work, including delivery of the International Strategy and its action plans.

Response: Accept

The Committee wrote on 25 October requesting detailed information on the draft budget 2024-25 as it relates to International Relations. A separate response will be issued to the Committee with regards to the budget. The publication of our annual overseas network report is just one of the methods that we use to report on our outcomes.

Financial Implications

N/A.

Recommendation 2

We call on the First Minister to provide oral evidence in person for draft budget scrutiny.

Response: See below

On 2 November, my office informed the Committee that I would not be giving oral evidence relating to the Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2024-25 and would instead provide a written paper.

I trust that my response to your request on budget information submitted to the Committee is satisfactory. As before, I stand ready to assist the Committee with any further written information that may be required following your consideration of the evidence.

Financial Implications

N/A.

Recommendation 3

We request a progress update against the short- and medium-term actions listed in the International Strategy's actions plans.

Response: Accept

As part of the review of the International Strategy in 2024, and any decisions to refresh our priorities, officials will provide the Committee with a progress update on the action plans.

We also plan to publish our Overseas Network Annual Report again later this year. This will set out the range of activity that is being undertaken to deliver against the actions in the International Strategy and Action Plans.

Financial Implications

None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government should produce a dedicated EU strategy.

Recommendation 5

If recommendation 4 is not accepted, the Welsh Government should be more explicit in setting out its priorities as they relate to UK-EU, and Wales-EU relations.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Government should set out how it will make the 'European dimension' of the International Strategy more explicit, as described by the First Minister.

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Government should include the EU as one of its priority relationships.

Response: See below

The economic relationship between Wales and the EU is vital to us and should be enhanced by the relationship between the UK and the EU. As I mentioned at the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee in September, I do not agree that a separate EU strategy is needed at this time. Our focus is on delivering the International Strategy, which includes our relationship with Europe. The retention of our office in Brussels, and the creation of a dedicated representative for the EU, affirms our commitment that Wales places a high value on our relations with Europe and the European Union.

As I explained in my follow-up letter to that Committee on 18 October, the focus and foundation of any developments of the relationship with the EU should be around recreating an economic relationship that works for both sides. The longer-term and fuller development of a deeper economic relationship, based on a better political co-operation between the UK and the EU, will realistically only be able to take place after both the European Parliament elections and the appointment of a new European Commission in mid-2024, and after the next UK general election. In the meantime, there will be a soft refresh of the International Strategy before the end of this Senedd term, and we will use this opportunity to make the European dimension more explicit.

Financial Implications

None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Government should set out its approach to the 2025-26 review of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

Response: Accept in principle

The scope and nature of the review of the TCA will be determined by wider political developments, including European Parliament elections, the appointment of a new European Commission, and the next UK general election. It is therefore premature to set out an approach at this stage. In the meantime, our focus is on ensuring TCA arrangements work as effectively as possible and on continuing to improve UK Government engagement with the Welsh Government, building on the Inter-Ministerial Group on UK-EU Relations. I note that the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee recently published its report of its Inquiry into UK-EU governance <https://senedd.wales/media/3jvbyvys/cr-ld16176-e.pdf>. We will respond to it in due course. The Senedd will wish to take that response into account in assessing the evolving Welsh Government approach to the UK-EU relationship and the operation and evolution of the TCA.

Financial Implications

None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 9

We call on the Welsh Government to clarify when costs related to overseas travel will next be published.

Recommendation 10

We call on the Welsh Government to publish costs in accordance with the commitment made by the First Minister to publish the latest costs after the end of each financial year.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government published the latest costs for ministerial travel overseas costing more than £500 per trip, together with the total cost of all Ministers' visits overseas, in September 2023: <https://www.gov.wales/ministerial-code-information-publication-6th-senedd>. This information is published as soon as possible after the end of the financial year.

Financial Implications

None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 11

We call on the Welsh Government to ensure the accuracy of the lists of overseas visits and visitors.

Response: Accept

Officials will continue to notify the Committee of all Ministerial meetings with diplomatic visitors to Wales, as well as Ministerial overseas visits, by providing a retrospective summary provided each month. For Ministerial visits overseas, additional information is usually provided by Ministers in a Written Statement within 10 days of their return.

Financial Implications

N/A.

Recommendation 13

The Committee calls on the Welsh Government to routinely include detailed analysis of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement where UK-EU matters are cited in their Legislative Consent Memorandums, as provided during the course this Bill's scrutiny.

Response: Accept

The example of the potential impact of the Data Protection and Digital Information (No.2) Bill on the TCA is a very good one for cases where proposed UK legislation needs to take account of the Agreement. I am happy to agree that Welsh Government LCMs on Bills that impact on the TCA should set out our assessment of such an impact.

Financial Implications

None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.