# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Raising the profile of Wales at the Rugby World Cup** |
| **DATE** | **27 October 2023** |
| **BY** | **First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford MS** |

During September and October, three ministers travelled to France to support promotional activity surrounding the group stages of the Rugby World Cup. The visits formed a key part of the Wales in France 2023 programme which celebrates the relationship between our two countries.

Firstly, the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism travelled to Paris and Bordeaux on 08 to 10 September to share experiences and lessons learned across the portfolio of sport, culture, tourism and heritage.

The Deputy Minister’s first engagement was a visit to the new Aquatic Centre being developed ahead of the Paris Olympics next year, followed by a meeting with the Deputy Mayor for Sport, Olympics, Paralympics and Major Events, to discuss the opportunities and legacy the Rugby World Cup and Paris Olympics 2024 will provide for the area.

In the afternoon, the Deputy Minister spoke at the Tackle HIV launch event alongside former Welsh international and Lions rugby player Gareth Thomas, taking the opportunity to highlight Welsh Government’s HIV Action Plan, before travelling to *Musée D’Orsay* for a meeting to discuss their successful post-Covid tourism recovery and a high profile art exchange with Amgueddfa Cymru in the Spring. The day ended with attendance at the opening ceremony and the France v New Zealand match at the Stade de France.

The Deputy Minister then travelled to Bordeaux for a visit to *Cité du Vin*, alongside the President of Fiji and the Irish Deputy Ambassador, followed by a visit to Chateau d’Arsac for a meeting with the Deputy Mayors of Bordeaux for Tourism and International Relations and leaders from the Bordeaux wine industry. The day finished by watching the Welsh victory over Fiji, with the match also presenting an early opportunity for engagement with the new Chair and CEO of the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU).

On 24-26 September, the Minister for Finance and Local Government visited Lyon to undertake a programme of events to promote Welsh culture and showcase Welsh food and drink ahead of Wales’ match against Australia.

Cultural links are a focus of Wales in France 2023, and the Minister was able to participate in some of this activity as she visited Lyon’s Rugby Village and attended a Wales Arts International showcase of the diverse range of cultural talent that we have in Wales.

The Minister attended the match against Australia alongside the presidents of World Rugby and France RWC 2023. The Minister also met with the Australian Sports Minister, Anika Wells, to highlight Wales’ approach to using sport as a lever for developing meaningful international relationships. On the economic relationship with France, the Minister met with the CEO of Boccard, which recently opened its first UK operation in Broughton. This was an opportunity to reaffirm our welcome and reiterate the support that Welsh Government can provide to companies who are looking for opportunities to invest in Wales.

One of the highlights of the visit was a food and drink showcase hosted by the Minister in partnership with Hybu Cig Cymru, Food Innovation Wales and Welsh food and drink companies. France was recently named as Wales’ number one export destination for food and drink, so this was an opportunity to bring together the best of Welsh cuisine, culinary and cultural talent at the home of French gastronomy - the *Cité Internationale de la Gastronomie* in Lyon.

The final visit on the Minister’s programme was accompanying Urdd Gobaith Cymru to *L’école de la Deuxième Chance*, a school that provides a second chance for young people who have dropped out of education by supporting them into employment. It was a great opportunity to promote our work on the Welsh language as well as discuss the employability and training opportunities that we provide in Wales through the Young Person’s Guarantee.

On 05 October, I travelled to Paris and Nantes for a two-day programme culminating with Wales’ final group game against Georgia. On my arrival in Paris, I attended a reception at the British Embassy, hosted by the British Ambassador, to mark the Rugby World Cup and attended by the presidents of World Rugby and the WRU.

The following day, I travelled to Nantes and was greeted by the Vice President of Nantes Metropole at Louise Michel Elementary School to accompany the Urdd as they led ‘Chwarae yn Gymraeg’; a programme that introduces the Welsh language and culture to children through play and activities. Youth engagement and raising the profile of the Welsh language are two core objectives of Wales in France 2023 and I have been pleased to see the Welsh language used in France throughout the year, but especially during the Rugby World Cup.

In the afternoon, I met with Airbus to discuss their operations in Wales and to understand more about their future work on decarbonisation and clean technology. Later in the afternoon, I hosted a reception for around 150 stakeholders at *Maison de l’Europe* - a home for Nantais-European collaboration which served as a Wales-hub, hosting Welsh language lessons and a ‘Wales exhibition’ of Visit Wales branding materials.

Later in the evening I attended a performance by Côr y Gleision collaborating with *Schola Cantorum de Nantes*, a choir from Nantes, at Notre-Dame de Bon Port.

My evening finished with a short stop at the Fanzone in the Rugby Village for a viewing of the France vs Italy game alongside other visiting delegations from Japan and Georgia.

On my final day, I visited Centrale Nantes Engineering School to accompany a delegation from Port of Milford Haven, RenewablesUK Cymru and the Department for Business and Trade, on a learning and development visit with French counterparts to discuss opportunities for collaboration within the offshore renewables sector, in particular the huge economic opportunity around floating offshore wind generation. The visit has generated valuable dialogue on collaboration on the Marine Renewable Energy supply chain, with French attendance now expected at Welsh events such as Future Energy Wales and Marine Energy Wales, and a possible Welsh delegation to attend Seanergy in Nantes in June.

My final visit was to attend Wales’ final group game against Georgia at the *Stade de la Beaujoire* alongside the President of the Regional Council of Pays de la Loire, Vice President of the Regional Council of Brittany, the Mayor of Nantes, representatives from France Rugby World Cup, World Rugby and the president of the WRU.

All three ministerial programmes, when brought together, provided Wales with an incredible platform to highlight Welsh food, culture and language as well as reinforce important relationships with our economic and political partners.