

Wales and the world

Gregg Jones

Welsh politicians and Welsh-based organisations are actively engaged in the international arena but is Wales making the most of the networks available and taking a sufficiently strategic approach to this work?

Although powers relating to foreign affairs, including negotiations within the European Union (EU), international development work, and trade, rest with the UK Government, Wales is actively engaged in international affairs through the work of the Welsh Government, the Assembly and other bodies.

This brings benefits in terms of business and trade (Welsh exports outside the UK are around £9 billion and imports around £6.5 billion per annum), EU funding, cultural and educational links with other regions and nations, and the contribution made by Welsh organisations and individuals through development work. However, a number of commentators have questioned whether the lack of an overall strategic approach means we are not benefitting as much as we could from these international links.

Wales and the European Union

Wales is viewed as a 'region' at EU level, which means its interests are represented in the two 'governmental' EU Institutions, the Council of Ministers and the European Council, by the UK Government. Success is to be measured, therefore, by the extent to which the key priorities of Wales are reflected in the UK negotiating position. Through its scrutiny of the Welsh Government the Assembly has a key role to play in ensuring this is being undertaken effectively.

There are other channels available to promote Welsh interests in Brussels. This includes the four

Participation in formal bodies

The Assembly is represented on a number of formal bodies at international level. These include:

- two EU networks for regional governments (**REGLEG**) and regional Parliaments (**CALRE**);
- **British Irish Parliamentary Assembly** and **British-Irish Council**, set up to facilitate formal dialogue on cross-border issues between Ireland and Britain;
- **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**, which promotes personal development of parliamentarians and sharing of good practice;
- **Council of Europe**, which defends democracy and human rights across Europe;
- Wales is a founder member of the global **Network of Regions for Sustainable Development (NRG4SD)**, established at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 to champion these issues at regional level.

Welsh MEPs in the European Parliament, the representatives from Wales on the EU's two consultative bodies, the Committee of the Regions (comprised of local and regional politicians) and the Economic and Social Committee (experts representing sectoral interests), and through participating in formal and informal EU networks.

Much of the day to day work in Brussels is co-ordinated through the offices based in Wales House – situated in the heart of the European quarter in Brussels – where officials from the Welsh Government EU Office, the Assembly, Welsh Local Government Association and the Welsh Higher Education sector are located.

Partner regions and countries

The Welsh Government has also established a number of relationships with European regions and countries primarily focused on developing cultural and economic links. These include: Brittany, Baden-Wurttemberg, Latvia, Silesia and Catalonia.

In addition to this, through International Business Wales, the Welsh Government has a presence in a number of countries globally including India, China and the USA, focused on developing commercial and trade links with Wales. The Welsh Government undertook a ‘critical’ review of its work in 2009, which led to a streamlining and re-orientation of its work around the objectives of the Economic Renewal Programme.

A strategic approach?

Aside from the Wales for Africa Programme there is at present no coherent strategic framework bringing together all of the EU and international work that Wales is involved in.

As a consequence there is no systematic reporting mechanism in Wales by which Assembly Members and stakeholders can assess and measure the performance of Welsh Ministers on European and international issues.

Under the Third Assembly information on performance was made available via general updates presented by the First Minister to the European and External Affairs Committee, and ad hoc information provided by other Welsh

International development work

The Welsh Government’s **Wales for Africa Programme** supports Welsh organisations undertaking development work in line with its commitments to the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals.

Examples of organisations in Wales active in international development include:

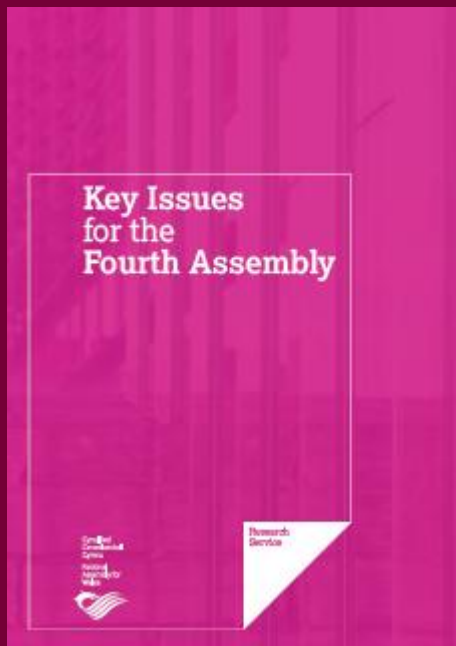
- Dolen Cymru (Wales-Lesotho link), which supports links in education, health, governance and civil society;
- Positive Women (working in Africa, in particular Swaziland) which promotes women’s rights, supporting the work of indigenous organisations;
- Bees for Development, which assists beekeepers living in poor and remote areas of the world, and raises awareness about the value of beekeeping for poverty alleviation; and
- PONT (Partnerships Overseas Networking Trust), which includes exchanging professionals and the twinning of school and churches between Uganda and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Ministers when questioned on areas of their work with a European dimension.

The situation is very different in Scotland, where the Scottish Government published a European Engagement Action Plan, which was part of a broader International Framework. The Scottish Government presented six-monthly reports to the Scottish Parliament on its performance in delivering the objectives of the Action Plan.

The issue of developing a strategic approach to Wales’ engagement with the world is one that Assembly Members may wish to pursue in the Fourth Assembly.

Article taken from Research Service publication



Key Issues for the Fourth Assembly

This document has been specially prepared for Assembly Members by the Research Service. It sets out some of the key issues likely to matter to Members during the Fourth Assembly.

[Key Issues for the Fourth Assembly](#)

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