



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Action Plan

Priority Regional Relationships and Networks 2020-2025



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Introduction and Context

The International Strategy, published in January 2020, sets out the Welsh Government's intention to prioritise relationships with three European regions (Brittany, the Basque Country and Flanders) and with a number of European and international networks. It committed us to develop an action plan to develop our relationships with priority European and other partners for the economic, cultural and social benefit of the people of Wales.

These relationships, based on shared values, interests and policy ambitions, are more important than ever since the UK left the EU. They are also important in the context of COVID-19 where regional governments have played vital roles in shared learning and in dealing with the pandemic. This action plan also covers our growing relationship with the province of Québec, recently underpinned by the signing of the Declaration of Intent in February 2020.

Although this action plan focuses on a small number of priority regions, that does not mean that we will ignore some longstanding relationships we have with a variety of regions across the world or that we will be closed to developing new relationships where there is a clear reason to do so. This approach will maximise our ability to support the three core ambitions of the Strategy:

- Raise Wales' profile on the international stage;
- Grow the economy by increasing exports and attracting inward investment; and
- Establish Wales as a globally responsible nation.

Wales is rich in public diplomacy and soft power assets and throughout the plan there is a particular emphasis on cultural co-operation, which can open doors and help to amplify Wales' profile. Our pioneering work in art, health and wellbeing is also of interest to our regional partners.

Strategic regional relationships and engagement in European and international networks also facilitate our ability to:

- Share our experiences, benchmark our performance and learn from others, helping to improve policy making and implementation domestically;
- Participate in collaborative projects;
- Advance a shared agenda with like-minded nations and regions and build partnerships for Agenda 2030 to mutually support each other's efforts to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals;
- Maintain connections to the EU Institutions through regional relationships, which will have value whatever the EU-UK future relationship;
- Support the Welsh economy by enabling businesses in Wales to grow their exports, in support of the Export Action Plan, as well as create opportunities for companies to invest in Wales; and
- Reach, engage and raise our profile in other regions and nations through cultural networks and events.

Each regional relationship is different in terms of maturity and alignment of interests. There are, however, some areas of common focus, such as a commitment to the principles of linguistic diversity, sustainability, and cyber security.

Approach

The International Strategy acknowledges that international relations are not the sole responsibility of government and calls on organisations and civic society to work together to deliver a co-ordinated approach. Welsh Government will continue to work with a wide range of organisations in Wales to support our regional partnerships. In particular, the Senedd is active internationally and has strong and valuable relationships with many international and European networks such as the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies and with its sister parliaments worldwide, including Flanders and Québec.

Wales' future engagement, both formal and informal, with the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and other Institutions of the European Union is outside the remit of this plan, and will need to be considered in detail once the future UK-EU relationship is sufficiently settled and operational. Nevertheless, this will certainly have value in maintaining a degree of influence and contact with political representatives from EU institutions and with other European regions.

This plan will consider each of the priority regions, describing current co-operation and setting out short (one year) and medium term (to end 2025) objectives. The partnerships with Brittany, the Basque Country and Québec are more mature than with Flanders because of the formal agreements already in place. The approach we are taking to developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Flanders also differs in that it will initially focus on one sector.

Our participation in international networks allows us to maintain strong links with a wide range of other regions such as Catalonia, the Dutch provinces or the Nordic regions. Our offices in Germany focus on three Länder – North Rhine Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg, and Bavaria. Our international offices play a key part in developing regional relationships.

A challenge for our future engagement is future access to European programmes. These have played a fundamental role in supporting co-operation between European regions, including our co-operation with these priority regions, since devolution. Wales is recognised for the impact of its research and high levels of international collaboration and we welcome that the UK is exploring options for participating in Horizon Europe, which should offer significant opportunities for research and innovation collaboration in the future. Learners, staff and organisations from Wales have benefited greatly from the Erasmus mobility programme. The Welsh Government believes that the UK Government should be

negotiating with the EU for full participation in the whole programme, as opposed to the partial approach set out in the UK Government's negotiating mandate.

The UK Government has, however, stated that it will no longer participate in programmes such as European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) and Creative Europe. Along with the other Devolved Administrations, we are challenging the UK Government's position, notably on ETC as it would jeopardise our relationships with Ireland, which has been strengthened through the various iterations of the Ireland Wales cross-border programme, and with regions across Europe via engagement in transnational and inter-regional ETC programmes. We will examine mitigating actions and explore how to incentivise organisations in Wales to collaborate with partners in the priority regions and countries. The Welsh Government's consultation on the future framework for regional investment¹ proposes a greater role for international and cross-border action.

This action plan sets out how we achieve our vision over the next five years. It is part of a suite of action plans that sit under the International Strategy, including the Export Action Plan, the International Relations through Public Diplomacy and Soft Power Action Plan, the Diaspora Engagement Action Plan and the Wales and Africa Action Plan. It is through complementary and aligned efforts across all these areas that we can truly make an impact.

Our Vision is:

To promote Wales as an outward-looking, collaborative nation, developing relationships that will raise our profile on the global stage to deliver on our International Strategy.

Our Mission is:

- To strengthen relationships with our priority regions building on existing Memoranda of Understanding and Declarations of Intent.
- To work with regions where we share joint interests in the context of responses to COVID-19, sharing information on the impact of the virus and exploring opportunities for the recovery phase.
- To establish partnerships with organisations across Wales to support the delivery of this action plan.

¹ Framework for Regional Investment in Wales (gov.wales/framework-for-regional-investment-in-wales)

Brittany

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Our relationship with Brittany, rooted in our shared cultural and linguistic heritage, was first formalised in 2004. The MoU was renewed in 2011 and again in 2018. While culture, education, people-to-people, skills exchange and linguistic links remain at the heart of this relationship, we are also exploring economic opportunities where our interests align, including cyber security, agri-food and marine energy. The Welsh Government's Paris office is developing economic opportunities working with the Regional Council of Brittany, the UK Government and the Breton agencies responsible for international development and trade and invest, Bretagne Development International and Bretagne Commerce International.

Co-operation

Cyber Security

Following a visit from the former First Minister to the French Cyber Pole of Excellence in Rennes in 2018, a strong link has developed between our sectors. For the last two years, we have facilitated the participation of the Welsh cyber cluster "Cyber Wales" in European Cyber Week, which takes place in Rennes every November. This has led to our participation in the European Cyber Security Organisation², a relationship that we are keen to strengthen. We are also exploring a new cyber partnership between Welsh and Breton universities, which will lead to joint research and student exchanges between our higher education institutions.

Agri-food

The Welsh Government is supporting Welsh food and drink businesses to work with their Breton counterparts and has commissioned a pilot study visit for a delegation of Welsh businesses and academia to participate in a three day learning and networking opportunity. The study will focus on opportunities that exist through utilising carbon dioxide and waste water (from food and drink manufacturing, including breweries and dairy) with algae to create additional products/funding streams. The pilot will build on our relationship with the Regional Council and the partnership developed with Valorial, the Breton agri-food competitiveness cluster. This builds on the ETC Atlantic Area and the North West Europe funded projects in which Brittany and Wales are partners: the Atlantic Healthy Food Eco-system (AHFES) project and the ValuSect project. These, respectively, aim to support food and drink businesses to be innovative in the area of healthier food products and the processing of insects as an alternative food resource.

Culture and Language

The cultural partnership between Wales and Brittany is underpinned by the ongoing partnership agreement between the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the Orchestre Symphonique de Bretagne who have commissioned and co-produced concerts; most recently the BBC NOW St David's Day 2020 concert. This follows an earlier joint concert in Rennes and a joint programme of staff exchanges and workshops. British Council Wales supported the relationship through its Wales Europe Mobility Programme.

The Inter-Celtic Festival in Lorient provides an international platform for Welsh artists. Wales has been the featured nation on several occasions. 2020 should have been the 50th anniversary of the Festival and would have featured the first Celtic summit for political leaders of the Celtic regions and nation. The Festival has been postponed until 2021.

President Loïg Chesnais Girard visited Wales with a cultural delegation in March 2020 to reaffirm Brittany's commitment to Wales in the post-Brexit context and develop sustainable and durable cultural partnerships. While the sector's immediate focus is on dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, we have identified the following joint activities:

- Twinning festivals e.g. Focus Wales and No Border, building on Welsh visit to No Border supported by Transition Fund initiative; Tafwyl and Breton language festival Gouel Broadel ar Brezhoneg (whose co-operation has also been supported through the British Council Wales' mobility fund);
- Nurturing a new Visual Arts network between Wales and Brittany;
- Developing skills exchange and diversifying the networking opportunities between cultural actors around key events such as Celtic Connections and WOMEX (involving Wales Arts International); and
- Breton participation in workshop on cultural rights and cultural democracy (organised by Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales).

Language sharing and learning from others is an objective of our Welsh language strategy, Cymraeg 2050, and we co-operate with the Breton language agency (Ofis ar Brezhoneg) through the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD). The Welsh Government has facilitated links between Adult Learning Wales and organisations responsible for teaching adults Breton and is currently collaborating on language technology. Representatives from Brittany will visit Wales to attend the next General Assembly of the NPLD in Cardiff, which will focus on culture and less widely used languages. There is a shared commitment to collaborate on the intergenerational transmission of language between parents and their children.

² The European cyber Public-Private Partnership contracted to the European Commission.

Marine Energy

The Welsh Government has facilitated connections between our marine energy clusters: Brittany Ocean Power attended the annual Marine Energy Wales conference in 2019 and representatives from the sector, including officials from the Regional Council of Brittany, plan to attend the next conference in 2021. This will enable a fuller understanding of each other's policy priorities and strengths – to date we have identified floating wind as an area of interest. Through Cambrian Offshore, the Ramsey Sound site in Pembrokeshire is part of the largest ever ETC project "Tiger". Led by the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult (OREC), the project has a number of Breton partners. In addition, Breton-based Sabella has just signed an agreement with Menter Môn to deploy tidal energy devices off the coast of Anglesey.

Education

The Welsh Government and Regional Council of Brittany co-organised an inward visit from Breton Further Education and youth leaders in October 2018, which led to a joint Erasmus+ project, led by Colleges Wales, involving Welsh colleges in the care, maritime and agriculture sectors. Using the positive relationships developed, and in partnership with Colleges Wales, the Welsh Government's European Transition Fund initiative "Securing Wales' Future Relations" (SWFR) planned to support young people from Welsh Further Education colleges to study at five Breton colleges and vocational secondary schools with a view to testing bilateral exchanges outside the Erasmus framework. The visits were due to take place in March but due to the COVID-19, only students from Cardiff and Vale were able to visit.

Media

The Welsh Government facilitated a media visit from Brittany to the Celtic Media Festival in Llanelli in 2018. This led to Breton membership of the Celtic media network and to two joint productions between S4C and Breton television. A representative from the Breton film and TV sector met S4C and BBC Wales as part of the cultural delegation in March 2020 to explore further opportunities to work together and identify potential partnerships. This work, and a possible joint call for co-production/co-development of ideas and projects, will be taken forward through Breton participation in the Celtic partnership. This is composed of S4C, the Irish Language channel TG4, ILBF (the Irish Language Broadcast Fund) and BBC Alba (Scottish Gaelic language channel). Representatives from BBC Wales and S4C will participate in the next Celtic Media Festival in Quimper, Brittany when re-scheduled.

European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) and Horizon 2020

The ETC and other European funding programmes have played a significant role in the Welsh-Breton relationship. Fourteen of Wales' projects in the ongoing ETC Atlantic Area and North-West Europe transnational programmes have Breton partners.

The range of themes is wide but there is a concentration on the bio-economy, the circular economy and renewable energy. One example of the latter is the tidal energy project between Swansea University and Breton-based developer, Sabella. There are eleven Horizon 2020 collaborative projects with representation from organisations in Wales and Brittany, the majority of which have a maritime focus. In addition, "Securing Wales' Future Relations" has supported co-operation between Aberystwyth and Rennes universities on the impact of Brexit on fishing and fishing communities in Wales, Ireland, Noord Holland and Brittany.

Our Actions (Short term – one year)

- Deepen partnership with Brittany on cyber security with a focus on developing academic partnerships between Welsh and Breton Higher Education Institutions and organising a visit by a Breton cyber delegation to Wales.
- Continue to develop the agri-food relationship and re-programme the cluster study visit.
- Continue working in partnership with Brittany (and other European countries) on current INTERREG projects, including the Atlantic Healthy Food Eco-system project (AHFES) and the ValuSect project.
- Facilitate an inward visit on marine energy to Wales with a view to consolidating relationship and identifying common strengths.
- Continue to share intelligence with the Regional Government of Brittany on the impact of COVID-19 with

a focus on sharing intelligence on health and the tourism sector.

- Promote and share learning on our approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals through the Well-being of Future Generations Act framework.
- Share learning on decarbonisation and recycling.
- Provide a strong Welsh flavour to the UK Government's "Les Voisins on Tour" initiative when it visits the Breton cities of Brest, Rennes and St Malo.
- Explore the possibility of re-organising the visits from Welsh Further Education colleges to Brittany that were postponed due to COVID-19.
- Host a conference on cultural rights and cultural democracy for the Breton Vice President for Culture, and a delegation from the museum sector, and progress cultural connections.

(Medium term – 2021-2025)

- Continue to build on existing relationships between the Welsh and Breton educational and youth sectors.
- Develop three sustainable and durable cultural, sporting and/or creative partnerships between Wales and Brittany with at least one to have a focus on the Welsh and Breton languages.
- Establish three collaborative projects in the priority economic sectors.
- Organise annual political-level meeting between Wales and Brittany and hold one Wales Week in Brittany and a “focus on Brittany” activity in Wales.



The Basque Country

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

The Welsh Government has enjoyed a dynamic relationship with the Basque Country since devolution. This relationship was formalised in July 2018 when the Basque Country President visited Wales and signed a MoU. Wales is one of the new priority regions in the Basque Government's International Strategy. Activity is focused on health, finance and innovation. The relationship has been underpinned by the launch of a new Basque call for projects in mid-2020 to support organisations wishing to co-operate with Wales.

Co-operation

Health

As the country that inspired the NHS and the first to implement statutory health impact assessments, Wales has expertise and learning to share with partners. Welsh and Basque officials have been working on an integrated health and social care action plan following a Ministerial delegation from the Basque Country in July 2019. The visit focused on areas of common interest to Wales and the Basque Country, particularly the transformation of primary care and value based health care. Following the visit, Wales' Chief Medical Officer participated in a 'Learning Tour' on social policy in the Basque Country, which is an annual initiative to present Basque policy and experience to experts from partner countries and regions. We are continuing to work to develop specific collaborative projects and exchange visits in areas of mutual interest.

Innovation

The Basque Country is recognised as a leader in industrial innovation and has a strong track record in attracting competitive international research and innovation funding. The Welsh Government continues to build links with the Basque Government and its agencies to share knowledge and experiences on innovation support and broker further connections with a view to maintaining and developing innovation led collaboration post-Brexit. Some examples of recent activity are highlighted below:

- The Welsh Government worked with Basque partners to launch the third edition of the Bind 4.0 initiative in Cardiff's Tramshed Tech in July 2019, which aims to connect Basque Technology companies (both indigenous and Basque based multi-nationals) to tech start-ups from around the world, which has attracted applications from Wales.
- The Innovation Team are project managing participation in two ETC Interreg Europe projects – Manumix and Cohes3ion – which focus on improving the effectiveness of innovation support systems in the advanced manufacturing sector and how innovation policies using the smart specialisation approach can work at a sub-regional level.

- The Welsh Government is also the Communications Lead for the Cohes3ion project which includes regular liaison with the lead partners Beaz Bizkaia and Orkestra (Basque Institute of Competitiveness).
- The Welsh Government supported the first Wales-Basque Territorial Competitiveness Forum. Led by Cardiff University and Orkestra, the Forum took place in Bilbao in February 2020 and sought to forge new strategic research and innovation partnerships that will accelerate the transition to Industry 4.0 (and beyond) among SMEs in the context of the Basque and Welsh smart specialisation strategies.

Cyber Security

The Securing Wales' Future Relations fund facilitated the first cyber delegation in November 2019 to attend the Basque Industry 4.0 conference and exhibition at the invitation of the new Basque Cyber Cluster. We are keen to arrange a reciprocal visit to Wales.

Life Sciences

We have identified strong alignment in the life sciences sector and officials have developed a relationship with the Basque Life Sciences Cluster. Representatives from the cluster were due to attend the annual life sciences conference "Tomorrow's Health" in Llandudno in March 2020 and we are now discussing when a visit may be possible.

Agri-food

The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs led a delegation from the Welsh food sector to the Basque Country in 2018 to explore collaborative opportunities. This provided valuable insight into Basque cluster policy (recognised as one of the oldest of its kind in the world), which informed the development of our Food Clusters and raised our profile in a target region. We are taking forward collaboration through our joint membership of the REGAL³ network of renowned food regions and the AHFES ETC (Interreg) project.



³ REGAL Network – Innovative and entrepreneurial European regions for territorial development in food and well-being.

Research and Education

Collaboration between Wales and the Basque Country is supported through the EU Research and Development programme, Horizon 2020. There are currently 28 current collaborations involving 47 Basque organisations in a range of areas including nano-technology, graphene, bio-economy and life sciences. As well as the Competitiveness Forum, two other applications involved the Basque Country (outward visits from researchers in Cardiff Met and Aberystwyth University in fields of health and language respectively).

With regards to further education, the Welsh Government and Colleges Wales have developed strong links to Tknika, the Basque centre for innovation in the vocational education and training sector. Welsh delegations have been frequent visitors (either through ERASMUS+ or direct Welsh Government funding), most recently in October 2018 to explore Tknika's model in more detail.

Taxation

The Welsh Government and the Basque Country are sharing information and good practice about tax policy and are working together to address common challenges and opportunities on tax. The Welsh Government has also committed in its annual Tax Plan to promote Wales' tax policy agenda with its international partners.

There is a positive and productive strategic relationship in place at official and Ministerial level. In November 2019, a delegation from the Welsh Treasury and Welsh Revenue Authority travelled to Bilbao to provide an update on tax administration and policy developments in Wales and to learn from the Basque Government's current work programme. This followed our invitation to the Basque Deputy Minister for Taxation to address the UK Tax Authorities Forum, hosted by the Welsh Government in May 2019.

Language

We and our counterparts in the Basque Government co-operate on language planning, both bilaterally and through the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD). We have a shared interest in inter-generational transmission and the use of technology and programmes to encourage the social use of language. As part of the Government's activities to mark the 2019 UN International Year of Indigenous Languages, representatives from the Basque government addressed the "Our Voice in the World" festival, about its work to encourage the use of the Basque language in sport. In autumn 2019, the Welsh, Catalan and Basque governments also exchanged learning on facilitating the use of our languages in Basque communities, inter-generational transmission of Welsh and the use of the Catalan language in trade and commerce.

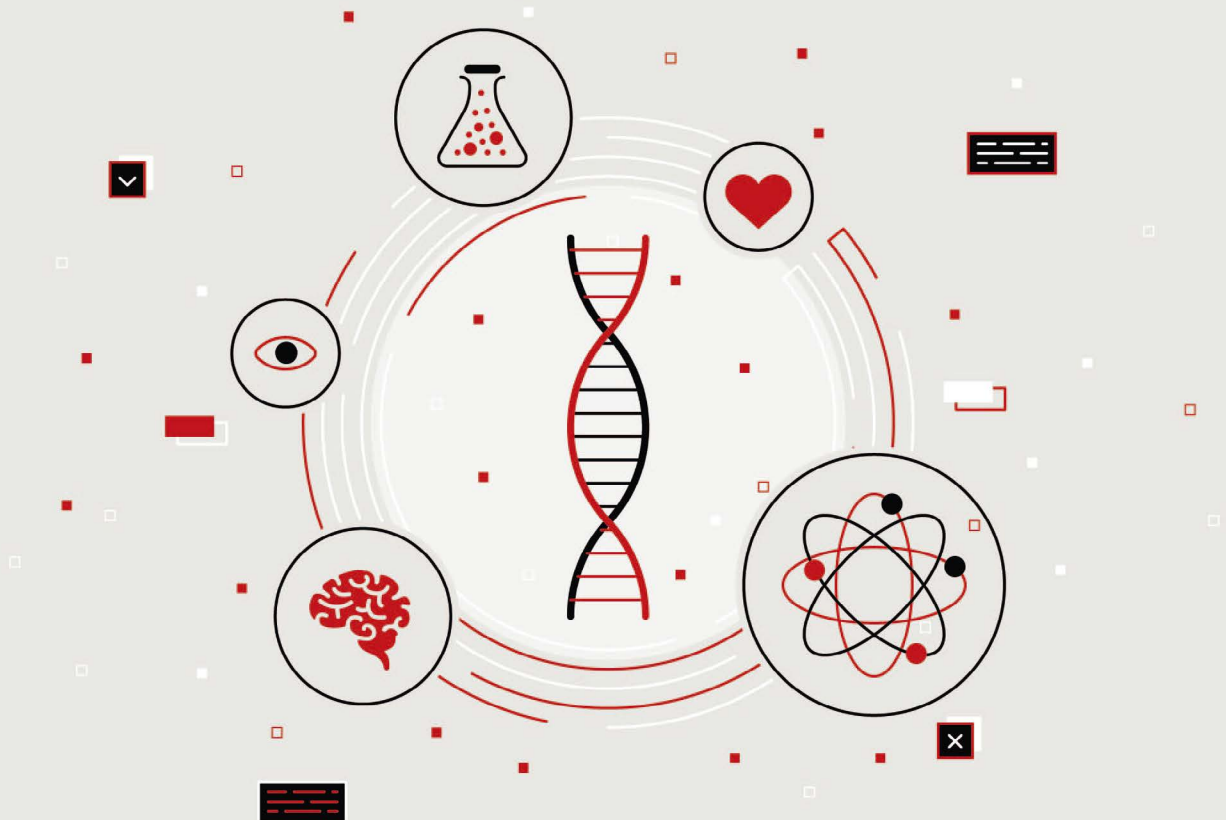
Our Actions

(Short term – one year)

- Welsh Government Ministerial visit or virtual visit to the Basque Country.
- Continue to share intelligence on the impact of COVID-19 with a particular focus on economic resilience and mitigating vulnerabilities.
- Progress co-operation with the Basque Government on language planning with Basque representatives to visit Wales for the General Assembly of the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity and associated conference on language and culture.
- Share experience and learning on the development of the Cymru Wales brand at the next Euskadi Basque Country Day in the Basque Country and continue exchanges on approaches to diaspora engagement.
- Invite a Basque Minister and companies to Innovation conferences during 2021 and organise a visit from the Basque Cyber Cluster.
- Invite the Basque Life Sciences cluster to Wales and run a medical devices pilot between both countries.
- Share information on SMART Innovation Productivity operation, the Welsh Knowledge Transfer Partnership and Open Innovation model and the Cardiff Universities data health check.
- Arrange a "dissemination" event to be held in 2021, as part of the Interreg Cohesion project, which will involve the Basque Country.
- Invite the Basque Digital Innovation Hub and the Welsh Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) to collaborate on projects with the aim of developing a future MoU.
- Continue to work together and collaborate on tax and health policies, where appropriate, to help deliver for our respective communities.
- Share learning on our approach to implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the Well-being of Future Generations Act, decarbonisation in the period leading to COP26 and recycling.
- Invite IKERBASQUE to Wales to share best practice on attracting global scientific talent to our respective countries.
- Issue a dedicated call for projects focusing on Research & Innovation to complement that published in mid-2020 by the Basque Country.

Our Actions (Medium term – 2021-2025)

- Develop and support three sustainable and durable public diplomacy, soft power or policy led collaboration projects.
- Establish two durable collaborative initiatives in the field of Innovation involving SMEs.
- Facilitate and support the relations between respective Cyber and Life Sciences clusters with a view to delivering innovation and commercial outcomes.
- Invite the Basque Country to participate in future Welsh Government Innovation conferences.
- Explore Basque policies and innovation in the energy sector, with a focus on marine energy and local ownership commitments in energy generation.
- Organise an annual political level meeting.
- Hold one Wales Week in the Basque Country and one “focus on the Basque Country” activity in Wales.



Flanders

Co-operation

The Welsh Government has enjoyed a strong relationship with the Government of Flanders since devolution, led by its office in Brussels and joint membership of European networks in the areas of sustainability, good governance and subsidiarity, health, cultural exchange and economic collaboration. This complements the strong relationship developed between the Flemish Parliament and the Senedd, with the Presiding Officer visiting her Flemish counterpart in Brussels in March 2020.

Our relationship with Flanders and the Flemish Government has been consolidated through activity to commemorate the First World War and the Welsh memorial which involved the Government of Flanders, the province of West Flanders, the Flemish Parliament, the Mayor of Langemark, where the memorial is located, and the local community. The memorial was unveiled in August 2014 and the centenary of the battle of Passchendaele was in 2017. Throughout the Wales Remembers/Cymru'n Cofio centenary initiative there were joint Flemish-Welsh projects. Two of the most notable were the exhibition of the 3D replication of Hedd Wyn's Y Gadair Wag or Empty Chair in the Flemish Parliament and the Poetry of Loss event in Brussels, co-organised by the Welsh Government's Brussels office and Literature Wales where contemporary Welsh writers explored and responded to the life and work of Hedd Wyn.

Building on our joint associate membership of the Four Motors regional grouping, the Vanguard Initiative and our presence in Brussels, we are forging connections with Flanders Trade and Invest and with Flemish business clusters and have established a relationship with the Flemish Aerospace Group (FLAG).

Flanders was designated a strategic partner region for health and social care with links between the respective health and care department, health boards, life science hubs, universities, specialist agencies and through our joint membership of the European regional health network which was housed in the Flemish Government and is now co-located in Wales House, Brussels. The relationship dates back to 2015 when a delegation from the Flanders Agency for Health and Care visited to learn about our health and social care system, public health approaches and social services. A particular area of common interest between Wales and Flanders is health inequality.

There is also a significant level of research co-operation between Wales and Flanders. This is exemplified by the 2015 signing of a strategic partnership between Cardiff University and KU Leuven, Belgium's highest-ranking university, which supported the growth of research collaborations between the two institutions. This has led to a doubling of joint publications and the thirteen joint Horizon 2020 projects awarded to date. KU Leuven is Cardiff University's most frequent university partner organisation in the Horizon 2020 programme. Cardiff University and KU Leuven are currently developing a joint Masters programme in Economic Management and have an agreement to award joint PhDs for collaborative doctoral studies. More generally, Wales' Chief Scientific Advisor presented Welsh strengths to the Flemish Research Agency in September 2019.

Flanders is a significant trading partner for the UK and is committed to finding a way to maintain close relationships with the four nations of the UK beyond Brexit. The new Flemish Governing Agreement (2019-2024) states that the government will strengthen bilateral co-operation with Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language met the Minister President of Flanders in January 2020 and agreed that the Welsh and Flemish governments should sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), focused on a number of specific areas. Initially, the intention is for the agreement to focus on tech and cyber security. That will build on existing links and the MoU between Cyber Wales and Flemish fintech hub B-Hive and reflect shared interests in cyber security. The aim is to broaden the focus to include health, culture, recycling and the circular economy over time.

European Territorial Co-operation (ETC)

In addition to the links established through Horizon, Welsh partners are co-operating with partners in Flanders through participation in four North-West Europe ETC funded projects on resource efficiency and use of renewable energy. Swansea University's ALG-AD project is leading work with its counterparts in Ghent (and Western Brittany) amongst others, creating value from waste nutrients integrating algal and anaerobic digestion technology while Flanders (Thomas More University and Flanders' FOOD) is involved in the ValuSect project referenced above in the context of Brittany.

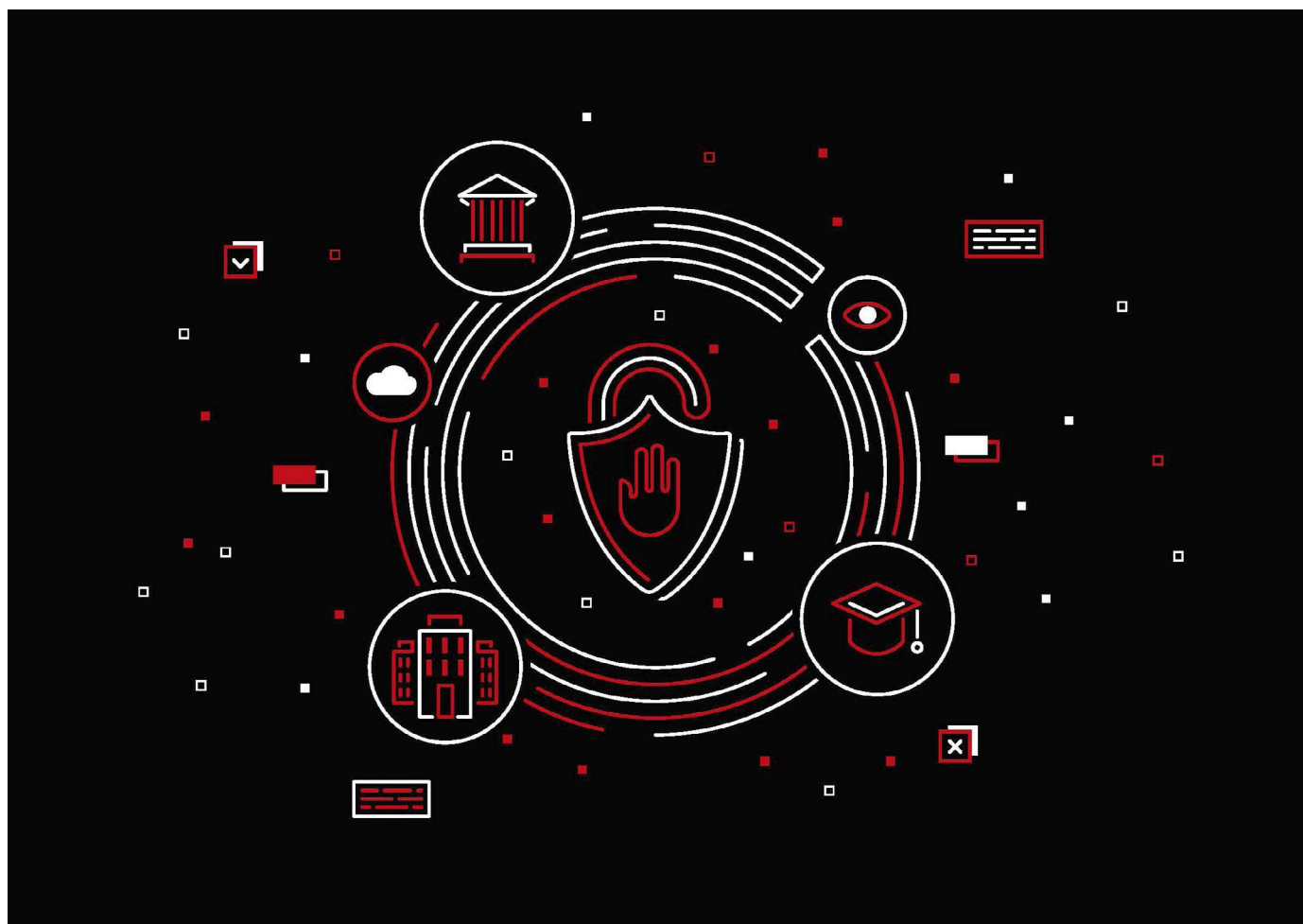
Our Actions

(Short term – one year)

- Develop and deliver a Memorandum of Understanding with an initial focus on tech and cyber security.
- Work with the UK Government to host a mission from Flanders on cyber security to Cyber UK which will take place in Wales in 2021.
- Explore the legacy of Wales Remembers/Cymru'n Cofio and support the relationship between the Flemish Peace Institute and Wales' new Peace Institute/Yr Academi Heddwch.
- Continue work to identify potential areas for collaboration in relation to health, linking to the work of the World Health Organisation's European Regions for Health Network (RHN).

(Medium term – 2021-25)

- Develop two collaborative cyber projects between Wales and Flanders.
- Promote and share learning on our approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals through the Well-being of Future Generations Act framework.
- Explore potential for two further collaborative projects in the other areas identified in the MoU.



Québec

Declaration of Intent

Former First Minister Carwyn Jones opened the Welsh Government's Canada Office in Montréal in March 2018. Since then, we have worked across the country to build a network of Canadian contacts and relationships, and nowhere has that been more successful than in Québec. Through our excellent relationship with the Québec Delegation to the UK in London, we initiated discussions on a Wales-Québec agreement that aimed to increase collaboration with Québec across five areas:

1. Trade, by facilitating access to supply chains;
2. Research and Innovation;
3. Arts and Culture;
4. Language policy;
5. Sharing of knowledge and expertise.

The Minister for International Relations and Welsh Language signed the Declaration of Intent in Montréal as part of her visit to Canada in 2020. During this visit, she and her Québécois counterpart, announced our first initiative with Québec – a joint call for projects with collaborative funding of approximately £17,500 from both sides. There are significant opportunities, and an appetite from both sides, to work closely and share learning.

Co-operation

Aerospace

Aerospace Wales signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with its Québec equivalent, 'Aéro Montréal', at the Farnborough Airshow in July 2018. The MoU's goals are to collaborate more closely, to facilitate joint trade missions and to increase supply chain opportunities in both clusters, particularly for SMEs.

Research & Innovation

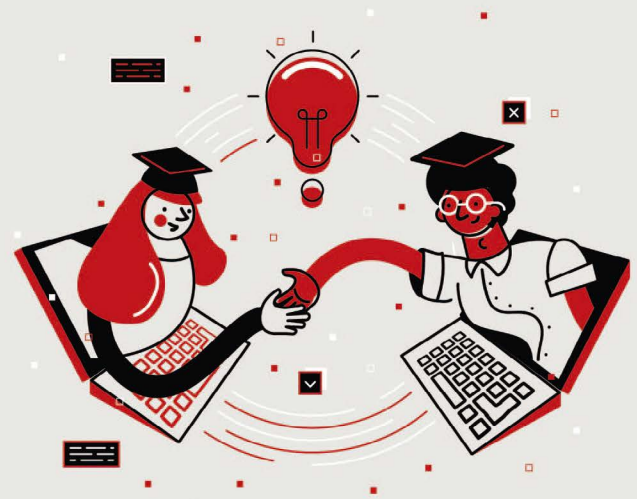
Québec is also an interesting example of a non-EU partner that has very close links with the EU. For example, we have been exchanging with Québec on its Provincial-level funding programme to support Québécois participants in Horizon 2020 projects, even though there is no federal match fund in Canada concerning Horizon 2020. This non-EU member regional co-operation with an EU programme, could be an interesting model for Wales in the post-Brexit period.

During May 2020, the Welsh Government's International Relations and Innovation teams held an initial call with Cardiff University Biobank and the scientific attaché at the Québec Delegation in London regarding the possibility of COVID-19 collaboration. Other potential areas of future collaboration may include cancer therapies linking with Artificial Intelligence (AI), Personalised Medicine and Neuroscience with an initial focus on Dementia.

Arts and Culture

Artists from Québec participated at FOCUS Wales in Wrexham in May 2019. The Agent General also attended and met the Welsh Government Minister for Economy & Transport. As part of this visit, BBC Wales interviewed the Agent General on the importance of collaboration between Wales and Québec, and the strength of our relationship.

We have showcased various English-language and Welsh-language artists at festivals POP Montréal and M for Montréal over the past two years, through a partnership with FOCUS Wales. We plan to do the same again this year, as well as work with Wales Arts International on bringing a delegation of Welsh artists to the biennial festival of performing arts in Montréal, CINARS.



Our Actions**(Short term – one year)**

- Select successful projects for the first joint Wales-Québec Call for Proposals in autumn 2020 which will focus on sustainability, economic development, and research & innovation, with responding and contributing to the recovery efforts for COVID-19 at the core of each project selected.
- Facilitate a series of digital events in response to shared learning around COVID-19.
- Work with the Québec Delegation in London to facilitate collaboration between Québec and Team Wales on the impact of COVID-19 and beyond. Québec has expressed an interest in collaborating with Wales on a COVID Biobank in addition to other key industrial sectors.
- Continue to plan with Wales Arts International to bring a delegation of Welsh artists to Montréal in May 2021 for the biennial CINARS festival of performing arts, and highlight Wales as part of promotional activity around this.
- Establish a work stream regarding French immersion education and adult teaching of French in Québec with the policy aim of establishing a policy exchange between the Office Québécois de la langue française and relevant divisions of the Welsh Government and its partner organisations.

(Medium term – 2021-25)

- Re-orient work with Aerospace Wales and Aéro Montréal on joint activity around Farnborough with collaboration on preparing our respective supply chains for a post-COVID-19 world, and the future of the aerospace industry.
- Develop the relationship with the Québec Government and commence a programme of Ministerial visits.
- Deepen collaboration between Genome Québec and the Cardiff University Biobank, encouraging further expansion of collaborative projects between Québec, the Digital Health Ecosystem Wales and SAIL Databank.
- Develop a partnership with a Québec-based party in the field of neurology, building on the strength of CUBRIC in Cardiff, in collaboration with the Chief Scientific Advisor's office.
- Promote and share learning on our approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals through the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

European and International Networks

Wales' strong alignment of interests with its partners means that Wales participates in many of the same European and international networks as its priority regional partners and, in some cases, co-founded these networks – with Regions4 and the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity being two such examples.

Internally, we have undertaken an exercise to prioritise the European and international networks in which the Welsh Government participates to identify those which support our strategic priorities, which we will return to once the UK-EU relationship is sufficiently settled and operational. Membership of European and international Networks will be more important post-Brexit.

In order to do this, we identified a number of criteria linked to the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the International Strategy:

1. Is the network aligned to wider Welsh Government strategies?
2. Are there opportunities for Wales to lead?
3. Will the network amplify Wales' voice on the international stage and provide access to influencers, decision-makers and international organisations?
4. Does the network align with existing collaborations with regional partners?
5. Is there capacity at the appropriate level to take on a leadership role?

Based on these criteria, we have identified the following networks where Wales can take a leading role:

- The Welsh Government has been elected as the 2020 chair of the **Vanguard Initiative**, which is an influential network of 36 EU regions committed to using smart specialisation strategies to improve the competitiveness of key industrial sectors across Europe, through collaborative projects and joint investments, promoting take-up of key enabling technologies. The Basque Country, Flanders and Baden-Württemberg are active members of the network. The Welsh Government's Brussels office and Business Innovation team jointly lead on engagement with the network. Since joining the Vanguard Initiative, Bangor and Swansea Universities have both been directly involved in the network's collaborative activities ("pilot projects") on bio-economy and sustainable manufacturing, leading to successful consortium bids for European funded projects. Cardiff University and University of Wales Trinity St David are also considering involvement in a Vanguard pilot project on 3D printing. We are currently working on the development of a Vanguard regional event in partnership with Randstad region (Netherlands) likely to be held in Cardiff during March 2021.

- **Regions 4 Sustainable Development (Regions4)** – A globally responsible nation is one that builds bridges and partnerships with others, sharing ideas, practice and learning lessons to accelerate action towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Regions4 is the global voice of regional governments in the fields of biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. All of our priority regions are members of this network and we sit on the Steering Group.
- **Well-being Economy Governments Network (WEGo)** – In April 2020, we joined the Well-being Economy Governments (WEGo) Network and will be working with Scotland, Iceland, Finland and New Zealand who all have a shared ambition to deliver and improve wellbeing through their economic approach.
- **Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD)** – The Basque Country and Brittany participate and Wales was a founder member and is currently the vice chair. The network raises awareness of the importance of linguistic diversity and facilitates the sharing of learning on language policy and practice. Mentrau Iaith, the Welsh National Colleges as well as four Welsh universities are associate members.
- **Network for European Regional and Local Health Authorities (EUREGHA)** in which Flanders is also active and which is co-located in Wales House in Brussels as Wales is the current chair. EUREGHA promotes collaboration and exchange between its members to improve health policy in Europe.

We will continue to play an active role as a member of The Climate Group, the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, REGAL (food) and the European Cyber Security Organisation. Wales is a founding signatory of The Climate Group's Under2 MOU and has been an active member of the Under2 Steering Group since its inception. The Welsh Government was pleased to be invited back onto the Steering Board in 2020 which underlines our international leadership and commitment to the Group. With more than 200 governments representing over 1.3 billion people, and nearly 43% of the global economy, the Under2 Coalition has provided a strong voice and platform for the collective action of subnational governments.

Leadership and active participation in networks also provides Wales with an opportunity to develop a distinct voice, promote the Welsh brand, and highlight Welsh specificity and excellence. These networks enable information gathering and sharing as well as offering brokerage opportunities for European programmes. Welsh Higher Education Brussels (WHEB) and the Welsh Government have also worked to strengthen Welsh universities' engagement with the influential European Technology Platforms that operate across a range of thematic areas. The importance of maintaining existing and developing new contacts and networks is a key priority in WHEB's strategic plan post-Brexit.

Organisations in Wales also participate in a wide variety of European and international networks. Examples include:

- the Network of Institutions for Future Generations, which the Commissioner for Future Generations chairs;
- Eurocities network of major European cities, of which Cardiff is a member;
- European Women's Lobby with participation from the Women's Equality Network Wales; and
- Welsh Higher Education Brussels (WHEB) supports Welsh universities in their European engagement through membership of networks such as the European Regions Research and Innovation Network and the UnILiON network of universities' Brussels offices.

Our Actions

(Short term – one year)

- Consider the International networks in which the Welsh Government participates in the light of the future UK-EU relationship.

(Medium term – 2021-25)

- Provide support for the engagement of Welsh organisations in international networks when there are clear benefits to Wales and alignment with the Welsh Government priorities.
- Welsh Government to maintain leadership positions in at least two international networks.
- Create new international network of regional cultural agencies involving initially all our priority regions.



Conclusion

We do not underestimate the enormous social, financial and economic impact posed by the COVID-19 crisis and the changes that are still yet to be fully felt as a result. However, we know international and inter-regional collaboration was vital during the COVID-19 period and we need to support each other on the journey to recovery. We also anticipate that the innovative, creative ways of working digitally during the pandemic will force and necessitate new ways to connect internationally.

There is still uncertainty on the future of the UK's relationship with the EU, although this should be sufficiently resolved by the end of 2020. Mobility arrangements with the EU27 are unclear, as is our access to European programmes. At the time of writing, there remains a reasonable risk of leaving the transition period without an agreement with the EU.

We have to re-double our efforts to find ways to engage with our priority regions and networks using all mechanisms that exist, such as Score Cymru to support many of the research and innovation activities outlined in the paper, or piloting new ways of working like the joint call for projects with Québec. In the longer term, the Welsh Government's consultation on the future regional framework for Wales⁴ proposes a greater role for international and cross-border action, which could include supporting co-operation with priority regions, networks and countries and we will be seizing any opportunities offered through UK Government funding channels.

The landscape is challenging but as a European nation our commitment to continuing to co-operate with our partners in Europe and beyond is unshakeable. We have built strong, sustainable relationships which will assist us to deliver the core ambitions of our International Strategy. Now is not the time for stepping back and looking inwards – we need to continue to be an outward looking, globally responsible nation.

⁴ gov.wales/framework-for-regional-investment-in-wales