



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

IRELAND-WALES

Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan
2021–25

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Shared Statement

Simon Coveney TD,
Minister for Foreign Affairs and
Minister for Defence

Mark Drakeford MS,
First Minister of Wales

Wales and Ireland are the closest of neighbours. Our strong and positive relationship is built on age-old connections and a deep cultural understanding. It is also a modern and vibrant relationship, made up of links and collaboration across many and varied spheres of activity.

Our geography means that Ireland and Wales share a common maritime story. The Irish Sea, the narrow strip of water which connects rather than divides us, has been traversed by our peoples over millennia. Our relationship has grown from those historic links, rooted in our common heritage and culture and close people-to-people, family, business, academic, cultural and sporting connections. We are also bound by strong economic and trading ties with significant levels of export, investment and tourism between us.

We also share common values and interests, as modern, globally connected countries. We are committed to advancing equality, sustainability, and the promotion of cultural heritage, and to engagement with the wider world and our diasporas.

Just over twenty years ago, a new enabling environment for Wales and Ireland came about. The 1998 Belfast / Good Friday Agreement included the establishment of the British-Irish Council, and the 1997 advent of devolution led to the creation of the National Assembly for Wales. Recent years have seen further developments that have brought new energy to our engagement: the opening of the Welsh Government Office within the British Embassy in Dublin in 2012, and the re-opening of the Consulate General of Ireland in Cardiff in 2019.



© Julian Behal / DFA

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The Welsh Government published its latest *International Strategy* in January 2020 while Ireland's strategy for international engagement is set out in the *Global Ireland 2025* initiative. This Statement flows from both of those strategies, and the commitment in the Irish Programme for Government to deepen relations with Wales. It has been drawn up to give structure, and practical expression, to our vision of how we can work together on shared policy areas.

This Statement outlines our joint commitment to bringing Wales and Ireland closer together in the period from now until 2025, investing renewed energy in deepening our cooperation and strengthening our connections for our mutual benefit. To deal with the implications of COVID-19, we will need new thinking and creativity. The necessary support for individuals, businesses, communities and sectors to rebuild in a sustainable way demands innovation and commitment, and provides an overarching context to our planned actions.

Our common EU membership and joint participation in EU programmes have been a positive force for our relationship, facilitating in recent decades a flourishing of collaboration across the Irish Sea. The UK's departure from the EU has already brought change and it will undoubtedly alter and reshape the Ireland-Wales relationship in the coming years. That said, for Ireland, Wales remains a natural partner and the ports of Wales will continue to be a vital gateway to Great Britain and beyond. For Wales, Ireland remains its closest European neighbour and a priority international partner.

Notwithstanding the inevitable change ahead, **our shared wish is for the closest and deepest possible relationship between the UK and Ireland, and between Wales and Ireland.** We welcome the maintenance and protection of the Common Travel Area in this new context; it means that Irish and British citizens will continue to be free to live, work, study, vote and access healthcare and social services in one another's countries. This freedom of movement and associated framework of rights enables profound connections across Ireland and the UK, including between Ireland and Wales.

We value the strength and resilience of our long-established connections. Similarly, we are fully committed, including through the Good Friday Agreement, to strong East-West institutional relationships. We welcome that Wales and Ireland continue to work side-by-side in the framework of the British-Irish Council and that our parliamentarians meet regularly through the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

Ireland and Wales recognise the critical importance of sustainable development, and are committed to implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Welsh Government has formalised its ambitions through the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 and the appointment of a Future Generations Commissioner. Ireland was the co-author of the SDGs within the UN. Progress on realising these goals is key to Ireland's ambition for its 2021-22 term on the UN Security Council. We see this shared commitment to sustainability as an area for continued cooperation and sharing of best practice, as well as framing our priorities for action.

Over the last twenty-five years, the Ireland Wales programme¹ has fostered the creation of uniquely strong and focused connections across the Irish Sea at local and sectoral levels. We are committed to working together to sustain the networks which have emerged through this programme.

The attached joint high-level Action Plan sets out six areas of cooperation, for which the Welsh Government has devolved responsibility. These areas are:

1. Political and Official Engagement
2. Climate and Sustainability
3. Trade and Tourism
4. Education and Research
5. Culture, Language and Heritage
6. Communities, Diaspora and Sport

We commit to meeting annually to review progress on the implementation of the actions identified in each area, and to renew the Action Plan. The Consulate General of Ireland in Cardiff and the Welsh Government Office in Dublin will lead on delivering that Plan. They will convene and encourage events to support lasting, positive connections. This will include a new high level **annual Ireland-Wales Forum**, which will engage political, economic and broader stakeholders to build relationships, reflect on ongoing collaboration and consider opportunities for further cooperation.



Mawrth / Márta / March 2021

¹ A maritime cross-border programme under the EU Territorial Cooperation strand of European Regional Development Funds connecting organisations, businesses and communities on the West coast of Wales with the South-East coast of Ireland.

Joint Action Plan

Introduction

To deliver on our Shared Statement 2021-2025, the Welsh Government and the Government of Ireland have identified and agreed a number of common areas for closer cooperation. Spanning political, economic and cultural engagement, our ambitious bilateral agenda is set out in this high level Joint Action Plan. Ministers will meet annually to review and update the plan, which builds on our ongoing joint work across a wide range of policy areas.

Sustainable development, and a commitment to achieving a better and more sustainable future for all are at the heart of our respective approaches to economic and social recovery from COVID-19, and the ongoing climate and biodiversity emergency. Given their urgency, climate and sustainability will feature as an important focus of our joint work, across six areas of cooperation, for which the Welsh Government has devolved responsibility:

1. Political and Official Engagement
2. Climate and Sustainability
3. Trade and Tourism
4. Education and Research
5. Culture, Language and Heritage
6. Communities, Diaspora and Sport



Emma Coulthard, St Brigid's Day Event 2020, hosted by the Consulate General of Ireland in Cardiff. © DFA



Irish and Welsh flags line the streets of Cardiff on Match Day.
© Welsh Government

During the lifetime of our Shared Statement 2021-2025, we will facilitate and support collaborations which will deliver lasting, positive and mutually beneficial outcomes. Central to this will be an annual Ireland-Wales Forum, convened by the Consulate General of Ireland in Cardiff and the Welsh Government Office in Dublin. The event will engage political, economic and broader stakeholders and will be an opportunity to develop relationships and deliver on the potential of current and future opportunities.

Over the last twenty-five years, the Ireland Wales Programme has fostered the creation of uniquely strong

and focused connections across the Irish Sea at local and sectoral levels. We are committed to promoting the work of current projects within the programme, as well as to exploring how to support its partners to build upon its successes and further strengthen its networks.

The Welsh Government Office in Dublin and the Consulate General of Ireland in Cardiff will lead on the implementation of this joint Action Plan, supported respectively by Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs and the International Relations Team of the Welsh Government, as well as a broad range of partners.

1

Political and Official Engagement

Our strong and positive bilateral relations are built on age-old connections and deep mutual cultural understanding. Since devolution in 1999, these ties have deepened with direct cooperation at political and official level across a range of policy areas, reinforcing collaboration and exchange at all levels across social, cultural, educational and economic spheres.

Our Governments are formally connected through membership of the British-Irish Council (BIC), an institution of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. In the last two years, Ministerial and senior official engagement has intensified in both directions and across sectors. Parliamentarians are connected through the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, and there is scope to deepen understanding and connections between Senedd Cymru and the Oireachtas.

To bring together voices from across all sectors, we will launch an annual Ireland-Wales Forum in 2021 as an important new space for dialogue and building relationships. The Forum will be convened by Ireland's Consulate General in Cardiff and the Welsh Government Office in Dublin. Themes for the Forum will be agreed annually and a key theme of the first Forum, in late 2021, will be sustainability and green recovery, ahead of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) being hosted by the UK.



Senedd Cymru, Cardiff Bay.
© Welsh Government



Snowdon in Wales seen from Howth peninsula, Dublin.
© Niall O'Carroll

WE WILL

- » Increase the number of high level visits each year, building on the Taoiseach and Welsh First Minister's bi-annual meetings at British-Irish Council summits, and create opportunities for further ministerial engagement;
- » Ensure continued engagement between the Welsh Minister responsible for International Relations and Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, including an annual meeting to review progress on this action plan;
- » Undertake annual bilateral consultations at governmental level with a focus in 2021/22 on the following policy areas: diaspora; design and implementation of language policy; education; housing; remote working; and sustainability;
- » Convene the first annual Ireland-Wales Forum in 2021, bringing together Ministers and a wide range of stakeholders to develop relationships, exchange policy perspectives, share learning and build collaborations to strengthen the broader Ireland-Wales bilateral relationship;
- » Take full advantage of the official opening of Ireland's Consulate General in Wales in 2021 to celebrate and showcase our bilateral relationship in both Wales and Ireland;
- » Deepen parliamentary links by supporting Senedd Cymru and the Oireachtas to explore opportunities for exchanges on shared challenges such as legislating for language policy, equality and sustainability;
- » Support and promote the policy priorities of our shared involvement in the British-Irish Council's work sectors, namely collaborative spatial planning; creative industries; indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages; digital inclusion; early years; energy; environment; housing; misuse of substances; social inclusion and transport;
- » Explore opportunities for collaborative work between a Welsh Government representative Office and an Irish diplomatic mission, under our shared themes of diaspora, sustainability and language.

2

Climate and Sustainability

Climate change is the defining global challenge of our time, and both Governments are agreed on the urgency of action in response. Through this Joint Action Plan, we will prioritise joint work that supports sustainable development, through climate adaptation and mitigation, green growth and the transition to net zero carbon and a circular economy. We believe that greening our respective economies can drive social and economic development and recovery from COVID-19 and offer opportunities for investment and growth.



*North Hoyle wind farm in Prestatyn was Wales's first offshore wind farm in the Irish Sea.
© Welsh Government*

The reliable supply of safe, secure and clean energy will be essential in phasing out fossil fuels over the coming decades and will play a central role in the creation of strong and sustainable economies. The further development of offshore wind capacity is an area of huge potential for joint cooperation and growth, particularly in the area of research and development. Protecting marine and ocean ecosystems is also crucial, and we will continue to support collaboration across the Irish Sea and between coastal communities.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an overarching framework for our joint work in this area, and both Ireland and Wales are committed to implementing the SDGs internationally, and at home. The vulnerable and marginalised stand to suffer the greatest impact from climate change, and as the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) approaches, we will work to ensure that their voices and those of young people and local communities are heard in the debate.



Policy discussion on the Welsh Wellbeing of Future Generations Act at Wales Week 2020, Dublin.
© Welsh Government

WE WILL

- » Exchange learning on progress towards implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including on legislating for sustainable development from Wales' 2015 Wellbeing for Future Generations Act and the development of indicators to measure sustainability and wellbeing;
- » Establish cooperation between Wales' Future Leaders Academy and Ireland's United Nations Youth Delegate Programme on issues affecting young people;
- » Explore opportunities to collaborate on climate action and the implementation of the UN SDGs internationally, through Ireland's Overseas Aid Programme (Irish Aid) and its partners, and Welsh agencies and organisations working to deliver the SDGs abroad;
- » Continue to highlight and promote the impact and findings of projects dealing with climate adaptation and coastal communities in the Irish Sea, under the Ireland-Wales INTERREG programme;
- » Use our networks to foster connections and support organisations exploring opportunities for collaboration in Irish Sea renewable energy, in research and development; in supply chain growth; and to showcase research excellence in renewable energies²;
- » Support the development of the 2019 Celtic Sea Alliance Memorandum of Understanding between Ireland, Wales and Cornwall, involving Marine Energy Wales, Marine Renewables Industry Association (MRIA), and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP);
- » Encourage the delivery of the Greenlink interconnector project between Wexford and Pembrokeshire.

² Including fixed and floating offshore wind, wave and tidal stream and tidal range

3

Trade and Tourism

Trade flows are central to the strong economic links between Ireland and Wales, while ferry routes through our seaports are and will remain key to connectivity of both people and goods.

There are currently some 85 Irish companies operating in Wales, employing around 6,770 people, while Welsh exports to Ireland were worth £1.69 billion in 2019.

In addition to direct trade links, the landbridge connecting Ireland with other EU markets plays an important role in both economies. Ireland and Wales will work together to support businesses to adapt to the new context provided by the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Furthermore, our respective trade promotion and investment bodies will support Welsh and Irish businesses to identify new export development opportunities, add value to existing supply chains, and encourage new business-to-business connections.

While our close proximity and similarities in our economies mean that, at times, sectors are in competition for either market share or international investment, there are strong opportunities to integrate supply chains, as well as to collaborate, including in research and development.

Tourism is a key strategic sector that has important benefits for regional development in both economies, as well as providing significant employment. As the tourism industry seeks to recover from the impact of COVID-19, Wales and Ireland will work together to share lessons in responding to this challenge.



The Baily Lighthouse on Howth Head is across the Irish Sea from the Isle of Anglesey in Wales. © Rob Durston / Fáilte Ireland



Greening of Caerphilly Castle, South Wales, St Patrick's Day 2020. © Alistair Heap / Press Association



Porthor, Gwynedd, a prominent site of tourism and conservation work, is one of the closest points to Ireland on the Welsh coast.
© Welsh Government

WE WILL

- » Work with and support key stakeholders, including trade promotion agencies and Chambers of Commerce, to support the delivery of trade missions, including virtual visits, in key sectors;
- » Share policy approaches and promote joint collaboration for a green recovery from the impact of COVID-19, including at a regional level in Wales through the North Wales Regional Deal, and North Wales as part of the wider Northern Powerhouse region;
- » Support relevant leads and enterprise agencies to understand, navigate and engage with public sector bodies, and opinion leaders and decision makers, across respective priority sectors of renewable energy, life sciences/healthcare, digital technologies, construction and infrastructure, aerospace, food and drink, public sector and creative industries;
- » Support the growth of Irish-Welsh collaboration in aerospace, including engagement by the Welsh Government Office in Dublin with the Dublin aviation summit in 2021, which will focus on aviation and the environment;
- » Support and develop opportunities for collaboration between Wales and Ireland tech ecosystems, such as the successful collaboration between Cyber Ireland and Cyber Wales in Dublin in Wales Week 2020;
- » Continue to support the development of the partnership agreement between the Guinness Enterprise Centre and Tramshed Tech, expanding links with rural hubs across both countries to promote 'soft landing' options for Welsh and Irish companies alike;
- » Promote appropriate industrial collaboration in the Irish and Welsh life-sciences industries, including through the Celtic Advanced Life Sciences Network (CALIN), led by Swansea University³;
- » Initiate exploratory discussions to foster potential cooperation and collaboration between our respective tourism agencies, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and Visit Wales.

³ CALIN is supported by the Ireland Wales INTERREG programme and led by Swansea University with partners NUI Galway, Tyndall National Institute, Bangor University and Cardiff University.

4

Education and Research

From monastic times, scholars have moved routinely between Wales and Ireland, a tradition reflected in more recent exchanges of students, pupils, researchers, trainees and academics between Irish and Welsh academic institutions.

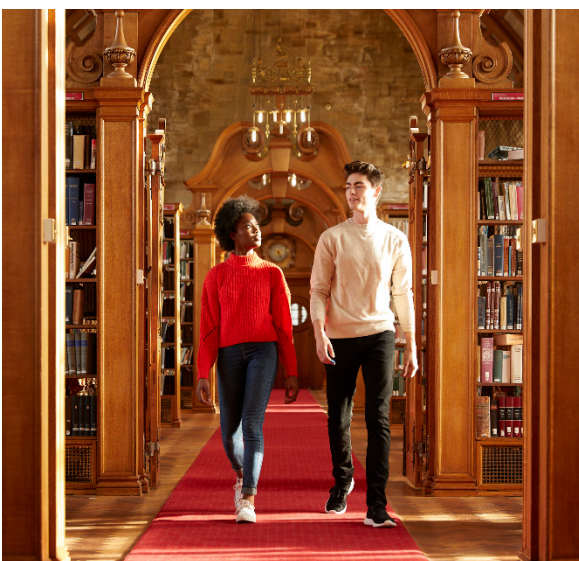


The Long Room in the Old Library, Trinity College Dublin.
© Phil Behan / DFA

Many of the existing strong and fruitful connections between academic institutions are grounded in EU programmes such as the Framework Research Programmes (Horizon 2020), Erasmus+, the Ireland Wales Programme, and UK-Ireland research cooperation programmes. As we adapt to the new context with the UK outside the EU, we are committed to supporting institutions to explore all avenues to maintain these strong collaborations.

There are opportunities for peer learning for schools in both Wales and Ireland, which face similar challenges and opportunities particularly around language, digital learning, and in response to COVID-19. Schools in Wales have maintained a hub facility for frontline workers, alongside support for learners through a national digital platform; both experiences offer learning for all parts of these islands.

We recognise that Gaelscoileanna and Welsh medium schools have the potential to learn from shared challenges and experiences around operating in a minority language within wider bilingual communities, and making the most of rapid advances in online opportunities for linguistic and cultural support.



Bangor University, Wales.
© Welsh Government



Urdd Gobaith Cymru and TG Lurgan members together at the launch of their bilingual partnership in Dublin.
© Urdd Gobaith Cymru

WE WILL

- » Support increased cooperation between our Ministers and Departments of Education, and schools, including around national digital platforms, language and culture;
- » Identify and promote opportunities for academic and student collaboration, mobility and exchange;
- » Explore the possibility of establishing new Welsh-Irish research fellowships;
- » Facilitate and support academic collaboration events / workshops in both countries which explore options to maintain the strong links between academia and business;
- » Through the Consulate General of Ireland in Wales and the Welsh Government Office in Dublin, jointly inaugurate in 2021 a high-level annual “St Patrick and St David’s” lecture to be hosted in Wales and Ireland in alternate years, supporting the exchange of thought leaders and leading academics;
- » Contribute to ongoing wider discussions on supporting closer, focused engagement between Welsh and Irish Universities, together with other stakeholder organisations, including the British Irish Chamber of Commerce, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), and Universities Wales;
- » Participate as observers on the British Irish Chamber of Commerce working group on Education and Research, and support and build on the “Celtic Connections” series of research and events.

5

Culture, Language and Heritage

Ireland and Wales benefit from a rich and often shared cultural heritage which flourishes in each country. Artists play an essential role in both countries, preserving traditional art forms and also re-imagining and representing our current societies through a modern and creative lens.

Globally, we promote our identities through our cultural performers, while at home the creative industries are economically, as well as socially, vital. The creative and heritage economic sectors have been particularly challenged by the pandemic and will need increased support to recover and thrive.

Several of our national and local cultural institutions are actively engaged in a wide range of initiatives which support artists, writers, performers and collectives to work collaboratively. Leaders in cultural and artistic institutions move freely between Ireland and Wales, while community and local organisations are strongly connected, with Irish participation through Conradh na Gaeilge at the national Eisteddfod, many local level musical and dance exchanges, and a branch of Comhaltas in South Wales.

We value the importance of language and cultural diversity in these islands, and know that we can learn from one another in the areas of language policy development and bilingualism.



Other Voices at St Mary's Church, Ceredigion.
© Welsh Government



The National Eisteddfod 2018, Cardiff.
© Welsh Government



Lynn Scarff, Director, National Museum of Ireland/Árd Mhúsaem na hÉireann with David Anderson, Director General of the National Museum Wales/Amgueddfa Cymru.
© Paul Sherwood/ National Museum of Ireland

WE WILL

- » Support the strong and growing relationship between our Arts Councils, Wales Arts International and Culture Ireland through a virtual stakeholder group meeting to further develop and enhance cooperation;
- » Continue to support collaborations for artistic showcases in festivals, including St Patrick's Festival, WOMEX, Horizons and the National Eisteddfod; and to enhance opportunities for literary cooperation and exchange by supporting cultural organisations, publishers, writers and other key stakeholders, such as Poetry Ireland, the Irish Writers Centre, Literature Wales and Academi;
- » Seek to support the growing connections between our national museums and libraries, including the sharing of learning and objects between the National Museums of Wales and of Ireland, as set out in their Memorandum of Understanding, signed in March 2019;
- » Continue to support and promote the three-year partnership which began in 2019 with Other Voices Festival and Lleisiau Eraill between South Wind Blows, Theatr Mwldan and Triongl TV. Seek to develop opportunities to engage with the Ireland's Edge, a multidisciplinary creative event series that makes up a distinct strand of Other Voices festival of music and ideas;
- » Support current initiatives and projects which promote awareness and knowledge of our shared history and built heritage, and encourage interested organisations to identify new opportunities, including in the context of the "decade of centenaries", the RMS Leinster, the Famine Memorial in Cardiff, and Frongoch in North Wales;
- » Support the development of partnerships between our youth organisations that, respectively, promote the use of Welsh and Irish languages, and specifically facilitate and promote the three-year partnership programme between Coláiste Lurgan and Urdd Gobaith Cymru to share learning and best practice in digital technology;
- » Continue to work through the British-Irish Council indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages work sector to support the development of, and policy cooperation for, indigenous languages;
- » Provide over €150,000 to support the teaching of Irish at Aberystwyth University and Cardiff University in 2020/21 and 2021/22 and to provide Government of Ireland grants for students from these courses who wish to spend a period of time studying in the Gaeltacht in Ireland.

6

Communities, Diaspora and Sport

People-to-people contacts are at the heart of our close relationship. From Celtic times, through the Norman period, the industrial revolution, and right up to today, families and individuals have moved between Ireland and Wales in both directions, and around the world, by choice or by obligation to make a better life.



St Joseph's Swansea GAA team at Croke Park.
© Páraic Ó Madóig

That the first Welsh-language radio broadcast was made from Dublin is evidence of more modern links, as are the many Irish social, sports and music clubs which have flourished across all of Wales.

The connection between North Wales and the Dublin/Wicklow area is extremely strong, as is the Swansea/Cork connection, and we will focus on highlighting these links.

We are committed to sharing our experiences in engaging with our diasporas and learning from one another to deepen and enrich our connections to our diaspora communities overseas.

Wales and Ireland have a shared passion for sports right across the spectrum; from grassroots community sport to elite professional level. This shared passion connects us in a meaningful way, and both Governments promote involvement in sport for individual and community wellbeing. The current revival of Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs in Wales is further testament to the long history of Irish communities in the country.



Members of the Welsh community in Ireland gather at EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum in Dublin. © Welsh Government



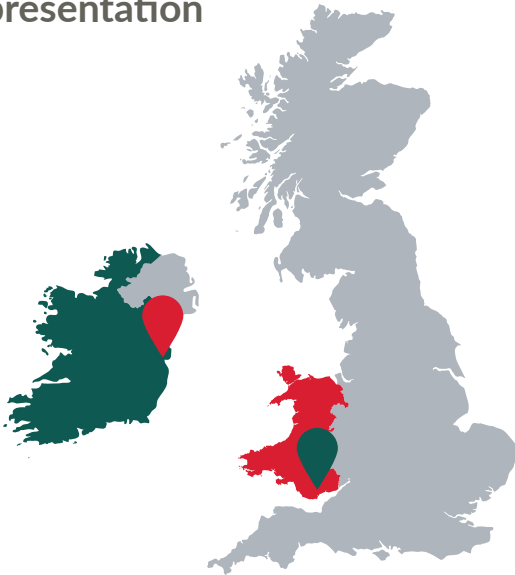
Ireland's Hugo Keenan and Wales's George North compete for an aerial ball during the Autumn Nations Cup series in November 2020.
© Brian Lawless/Press Association

WE WILL

- » Explore the possibility of an official-level secondment from the Welsh Government to the Irish Abroad Unit in Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs to intensify our exchange of knowledge and expertise in both direct and indirect diaspora engagement;
- » Build engagement with our diaspora communities, including through joint events, where possible;
- » Through the Consulate General of Ireland in Wales, promote awareness of and access to the Government of Ireland's Emigrant Support Programme funding for organisations supporting Irish communities in Wales;
- » Share best practice in increasing participation and inclusivity in sport to promote broader health and well-being outcomes across society;
- » Jointly identify and promote existing connections between communities, such as twinned towns; schools; and sports clubs, by signposting interested communities to appropriate local authority and other supports;
- » Build on the important sporting links between us, including by fostering connections between sporting organisations, and hosting events which maximise opportunities for creating connections and networks on the occasions of world-renowned men's and women's Six Nations' rugby matches, as well as other sporting events;
- » Through the Consulate General of Ireland in Wales, continue to support the growth and development of Gaelic Games in Wales, through community-based GAA clubs.

Overview

Representation



The **Welsh Government Representative Office** opened in Ireland in 2012.

Ireland re-opened its Consulate General in Cardiff in 2019.

Academia



Celtic Advanced Life Sciences Network (CALIN), supported by the Ireland Wales INTERREG programme and led by Swansea University, **brings together business, academic and clinical excellence to encourage growth and innovation** across the life science sector **in Ireland and Wales**.

Trade



85 Irish companies operate in Wales, employing around

6,770 people.

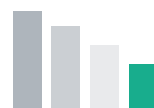
(Welsh Government).



Welsh exports to Ireland were worth

£1.69 billion

in 2019,



making **Ireland Wales' 4th largest trading partner.** (Welsh Government).

Sustainable Development



Ireland **co-chaired** the **intergovernmental negotiations** on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Wales has **legislated to implement the UN SDGs** through the 2015 Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.



Culture and Heritage

The 2019 **Memorandum of Understanding** between the National Museums of Wales and of Ireland to share learning and objects



is an example of the **growing connections between our national museums and libraries.**

Community and Sport



The **Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)** has been represented by community-based clubs **in Wales** for well over **60 years.**



The **Dublin Welsh Male Voice Choir** has been in **existence for over 50 years** and owes its **origins to the St. David's Society**, formed in the late 19th Century.



Every two years, **Irish** and **Welsh** rowing clubs **compete in** the 150km **Celtic Challenge rowing race** from Arklow to Aberystwyth.



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