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Welsh Government International Strategy: Notes towards a Culture chapter



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Introduction

The Welsh Government intends to publish an International Strategy. As part of the consultation to inform this strategy, Wales Arts International/Arts Council of Wales has convened a number of meetings. This note draws together some of the themes and issues to emerge from those conversations. It also highlights topics that might feature within the strategy in due course.

The expectation is that the International Strategy will be sharply focused and practical. It will be a document that focuses on measurable action. However, the strategy itself also offers a chance to amplify a new ambition and approach, making sure that Welsh culture is fulfilling its international potential.

The new approach could see culture underpinning Wales' international relations campaign by coordinating bringing together some of the nation's strongest cultural assets (in arts, design, digital, film & TV, heritage, literature, publishing, skills and sports) with Wales' international assets (Welsh Government global network of offices and staff; UK Embassies and government agencies; Presence at international showcase and trade and showcase events; trade and culture missions; Membership of networks and trade associations ; Cultural societies and centres, alumni and diaspora and associated digital assets).

The Culture chapter in the strategy will be short and to the point. However, Wales' cultural relations agenda deserves its own focus and underpins the whole strategy potentially. The rich discussions arising from the consultation have revealed a quality of ideas and thinking that deserve to be shared during this preparatory phase. This work shouldn't be lost, even if it doesn't find its way into the final strategy document.

The strategy must deliver economic benefits for Wales. But how it does this will be key. The people and communities in Wales should be inspired and engaged with the world through the quality and reach of Wales' cultural assets. Wales' reputation around the world depends on promoting an identity which is confident, distinct and rooted in a clear articulation of Wales' values and culture.

Culture has a significant role to play in helping to illuminate the strategy's international objectives, not least in relation to the areas of activity that Culture covers – arts, creative industries, heritage, sports, major events and tourism. However, culture contributes to many other aspects of civic life and these notes offer suggestions that might help to enliven other chapters in the strategy.

A country rich in cultural assets

Let's not ignore a sense of vision. So imagine a new World wide Wales – a nation whose multi-lingual voices are heard on world stages, in film and games, a small nation that punches above her weight in international sporting events, whose shared heritage reaches out across continents

And when you've done that – pictured it, heard it, enjoyed it, read about it, celebrated it – try to think of our country without song, the spoken word on stage and screen, without our national sports teams or our historic castles and monuments, without poetry and novels, and dance and sculptures and ceramics and paintings and images, our two languages and all of the living traditions that are making our contemporary culture so dynamic. It's why Culture matters, and why it deserves a prominent presence in our strategy.

We're ambitious for Culture in Wales. But we like the small steps too. In the spirit of our Patron Saint, St David, great things come from two people and two cultures playing music together. It's about reaching an authentic sense of our place in the world.

For all of the fuss and ruckus of our progress through the new millennium, we really don't know very much about the world we live in. We mostly don't know very much about why we're here, and we don't know very much about who we really are. Culture helps us to explore our sense of place and the world that's around us. They help us to appreciate wisdom and beauty, insight and perception.

Our culture binds us with each other – in Wales and with the world.

Our passion for the arts and sports connect us with cultures internationally. It enables a multi-lingual conversation, unique to Wales in the UK. The English language is usefully a lingua franca for most western businesses. However, most people who do use the English language outside the UK also speak another language, and therefore also engage in a different set of cultural activities. Bilingual Wales has more linguistically in common with other nations. Playing to this strength gives Wales a distinctive cultural asset around the world.

Our Values as a nation

Our values guide us to find the right partners and the right places to work.

We believe in a Wales that:

- is communitarian and socially engaged
- tolerant, respectful, open, equal and diverse
- values its culture
- upholds the importance of freedom of expression
- values its citizens as responsible global citizens and believes in their right to live and contribute to an enriched cultural life
- pride in its bilingualism and celebrates its multilingual communities
- values its many languages as natural bridges to other cultures

These values are enshrined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, and this is the long term roadmap that should guide the development of our strategy.



A prosperous Wales



A resilient Wales



A healthier Wales



A more equal Wales



A Wales of more cohesive communities



A Wales of vibrant culture and Welsh Language



A globally responsible Wales

A prosperous Wales

A prosperous Wales nurtures creative talent, promotes economic growth and takes pride in Wales as a compelling place to live, work and visit. All over Wales, arts centres have played an important role in regeneration and in giving our people the confidence to succeed in life. Arts and culture promote a powerful image at home and abroad. They support the nation's sense of pride and wellbeing, offering the memorable, the inspiring, the enjoyable.

The creative and cultural industries are a vital engine for Wales' economy. In the UK Creative Jobs have increased by 28.6% since 2011 and now more than 2 million people are employed in the creative sector. This accounts for 1 in 11 jobs in the UK and the Creative industries employ 700,000 more people than the financial services. They contribute directly in terms of job and wealth creation, through the creation, distribution and retail of goods and services. They also help put Wales on the international map, raising its image world-wide and making the country a culturally attractive environment for visitors and businesses to invest. But much more needs to be done to connect our culture and creative economy to the significant opportunities new markets in Asia offer.

A resilient Wales

The changing world demands more collaboration and cooperation from everyone. It's not a time to draw up the bridges or build walls. It's time to get culturally ready to work in places where Wales is unknown. We've had to re-invent

ourselves many times in the past and we must do so again. As jobs and income from traditional industries across the country – farming, fishing, mining – have declined or died, tourism has had to step in and spearhead regeneration. Harbours have evolved into marinas and sail-training centres, dockland warehouses have new lives as museums, galleries and film sets, disused rail lines have been turned into cycle-ways, crafts have replaced cows in redundant barns. We've also become much more sophisticated in selling Wales; striving to develop tourism from a seasonal windfall to year-round revenue by exploiting the appeal of our unique cultural treasures. How we take on the digital challenge will be core to our resilience.

But a resilient Wales also has to be a tolerant and an open Wales – in real life and on digital platforms. International cultural collaboration brings people together. It encourages exploration and a sense of curiosity. It reduces fear of the different and the unknown.

The arts, culture and in particular the Welsh language have a resilience that is respected internationally. They survive in a delicate cultural and environmental multi-cultural and multi-lingual eco-system which by default are international.

Ambitious and learning

Arts and Culture can nurture a young person's ability to question and make connections, to develop the capacity for independent, critical thought. They can inspire young people with new ambition and confidence, challenging poverty of

aspiration and breaking the cycle of deprivation. This can be the key that unlocks the door to further and higher education, and in time employment and enterprise.

The arts inspire... they can also connect young people creatively with the world beyond. They do so daily – formally in school, and informally through family, digital platforms, live experiences at youth clubs such as the Urdd Eisteddfod or Young Farmers. Yet much more can be done to support young people from deprived backgrounds to be inspired by great art, and also to access the world beyond their own borders or experiences.

Initiatives to encourage children in Wales to engage with other cultures (whether in school or informally) by partner organisations such as British Council's Connecting Classrooms or China's Confucius Institute or the Arts sector itself, are worth mapping and developing, as well as benchmarking against what other countries offer their children.

A healthier Wales

A growing volume of academic research has demonstrated the positive impact that engaging with creative activity and the arts can have on health and well being. By supplementing medicine and care the arts can improve the health of people who experience mental or physical health problems.

Well being, in its widest sense, is a key outcome of arts and cultural activity. Creativity, culture and the arts can help raise aspiration, confidence, a sense of community

and cohesion, and individual and community well-being. They are a powerful force in the development of improved public health.

Wales may be leading the world in terms of arts for older people but our Arts in Health work is having beneficial impact across the full ranges of age, class and geography in Wales. These experiences are sought internationally and valuable skills are needed in countries like Japan and China with significant aging populations. Aging poses cultural as well as health challenges.

A more equal Wales

We aspire to a society that embraces equality and celebrates difference, wherever it's found in race, gender, sexuality, age, language, disability or poverty. After all, a generous, fair minded and tolerant society is instinctively inclusive and values and respects the creativity of all its citizens.

Inequalities and poverty in our communities are reflected in the many cultural, social, physical and economic barriers that impede people's access to the arts. In some cases, communities can feel as much of an affinity with a country elsewhere as they do with their fellow citizens here in Wales.

Creating a new cultural context that celebrates internationalism through engaging with the diverse international communities in Wales, ensuring equalities of opportunities for all and sharing good practice in terms of inclusive work is a new ambition for our work and investment. of opportunities for all and sharing good practice in terms of inclusive work is a new ambition for our work and investment.

A Wales of cohesive communities

In some cases, communities can feel as much of an affinity with a country elsewhere as they do with their fellow citizens here in Wales. Arts and culture can provide new cultural references and context that engender a sense of internationalism ensuring equalities of opportunities for all and sharing good practice in terms of inclusive work internationally.

A Wales of vibrant culture and Welsh language

The Welsh Government's ambition is for Wales to be the most creatively active nation in Europe, creating "a society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language" and a culture which invites and encourages people to participate in the arts is key. Our culture is the life-blood of that ambition.

Taking part brings all kinds of benefits. It brings enjoyment, but it also helps people to become more confident, and to find out about themselves and their communities. It can boost personal, physical and mental well-being.

Our arts companies and practitioners speak effectively in and for Wales, at home and abroad. We know arts, culture and languages give Wales its unique personality. They bring the world into our communities and represent Wales around the world. Wales' linguistic expertise and bilingualism makes us unique in the UK and provide a unique selling point internationally. Whilst Cymraeg is the contemporary ancient language of Britain Brythoneg, it has

survived the centuries through effective linguistic and cultural innovation.

Key literary and linguistic developments may now be in digital form, but historically the Welsh language's international cultural engagement dates back well before the translation of the Bible to Welsh for the first time. Other key national innovations of their time were the creation of National Library of Wales, BBC Wales and S4C. More recently in the arts Apps such as Sibrwd by Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru (which whispers translated commentary in your ear as you enjoy theatre) are models for other languages to follow.

The Welsh Government's ambition to have a million Welsh speakers by 2050 and its key investment culturally in the National Eisteddfod as Wales' ultimate and original talent show, has a potential international reach, career progression and appeal.

A globally responsible Wales

The United Nations Goals for sustainable development acknowledge the natural and cultural diversity of the world and recognize that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development.

As the first nation to make culture the fourth pillar of sustainable development, Wales has much to offer the UN Goals in terms of sharing our experience and learning from others.

Getting the message across – branding and campaigns

Developing a dynamic and authentic cultural dimension to the *This is Wales* brand needs to be a priority. As well as being a platform to convey the culture of the nation, it could be a shopfront for Wales' Creative potential. It's also an opportunity to place the branding of Wales at key events around the world and in Wales.

There is widespread consensus around the need for an authentic Welsh cultural brand and story to tell as part of a vigorous programme of campaigning activity. We should be more campaign focused. The aim of any campaigns would be to either raise the profile of Wales and her culture, or to change perceptions.

The *This is Wales* brand needs to be a platform delivered at arm's length from Government. It could be a potential shop front for assets / skills / expertise and IP as well as promotional arm for tourism and trade. It could act as listings of Welsh engagement in particular cities and /or an in country database. However, it will be only as good as the inputs it gets and the resources it can secure.

Strong messaging about Wales will be needed to counteract the negative perceptions of the UK being caused by Brexit. If there is a Brexit silver lining, it is that there is the willingness and need to collaborate internationally in a way never done before.



Which priority? Which country?

Whether driven by economic, cultural diplomacy or opportunistic reasons, the question around geographic priority remains. There can be many reasons to choose a particular focus – it can be economic, or based around cultural diplomacy. It could be a particularly interesting market or event for a particular artform or an individual cultural player.

Whilst the organisations can work together in key markets to grow Wales' reputation, there will always be a need to follow particular economic or cultural opportunities that makes sense for an orchestra, a museum or a football team. However, it seems sensible to agree that when a country or a city is prioritised by government, this becomes a particular focus of attention.

The UK Soft Power Strategy

The imminent launch of the UK Soft Power Strategy is a key moment for Wales' cultural relations approach.

The new draft soft power strategy, led by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will be shared with Welsh Government via the British Council Cultural Diplomacy Group (also attended by Arts Council of Wales and Amgueddfa Cymru). It will be published in conjunction with the Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn.

The strategy's main delivery brand (the GREAT campaign) has implications for Wales. It is important that Wales' identity is not drowned out within a brand that for many has unfortunate colonial connotations. We should demand more for Wales' culture from the UK Government and its agencies and ensure the language and tone used to represent Wales and the wider UK is contemporary, culturally respectful, welcoming and honourable.

Strategy options

Some or all of the following might feature in the final Culture chapter.

1. **A strategy driven by values, ambition and uniqueness** – the Well being of Future Generations provides the overall framework for the strategy.
2. **A strategy that inspires and excites** – the final strategy document should be contemporary, edgy and engaging, presenting a dynamic picture of 21st century Wales and its people.
3. **A co-ordinated approach to strategy delivery** – structures must be in place to share information about activity and opportunities. This would mean:
 - each sector (including the Cultural sector) would convene biannual meetings of national companies/sector lead bodies to exchange information and identify opportunities for joint working. This should include relevant Welsh Government officials (Arts & Heritage, Creative Industries, Sports, Visit Wales, Major Events etc);
 - representatives of each sector should meet annually in a symposium hosted by the Minister to monitor progress and plan future strategy delivery.
4. **A menu of developmental services that build the capacity of Wales' cultural sector to engage and participate internationally** – this would include:
 - funding programmes that assist individuals to travel, broaden their experience and develop new creative connections;
 - business support to ensure that individuals and organisations are prepared and equipped to exploit established international markets;
 - support for Wales' involvement in Trade Fairs, showcases, festivals and biennales including showcase events and delegation visits to Wales.
5. **A targeted approach** – we will focus our work as much as possible in those places where there is a “greater good” benefit for Wales. These are likely to be areas where:
 - Welsh Government has mandated the sector to develop cultural relations;
 - Wales is present with a long term engagement and with political, cultural and financial weight that makes a sustainable relationship more achievable;
 - there are significant development opportunities for cultural organisations in Wales;
 - there are relevant connections to the cultural life of Wales;
 - other territories demonstrate a commitment to working with Wales.

6. A joined up approach – greater effort will be made to ensure best use of the Welsh Government’s resources based on nurturing egalitarian cultural relations – not ‘soft’ power:

- Cultural Relations capacity should be created in Welsh Government’s new International relations department;
- protocols to be developed for each overseas Welsh Government Office describing how they will be assisting delivery of the strategy;
- an audit of Wales’ global assets (eg: UK Embassies, UK governmental bodies, British Council);
- Welsh Government Ministers will support the development of key international projects by travelling with cultural delegations and ensuring that there is a cultural component to all trade delegations.

7. A clear, dynamic and useable ‘brand’ – *This is Wales* should be the basis for providing a consistent approach to promoting Wales’ identity and its cultural activities. Within its resources it should have:

- a strong image library featuring Wales’ cultural assets;
- a series of short promotional films that can be used to underpin key aspects of the International Strategy;

promotional information about Wales’ cultural assets, available in published or online form.

8. A campaign driven approach – engaging a range of partners to promote positive messages about Wales including:

- developing a cross platform approach to promoting Wales’ cultural assets;
- exploiting the potential of major events (such as St David’s Day, high-profile sporting tournaments etc);
- recruiting a cohort of Ambassadors who can promote Wales’ image and its interests around the world and a programme to make every child in Wales a future ambassador development of a “Wales Alumni” project –embedding those who chose to come to Wales to study;
- Diaspora 2050 – the new generation of Welsh descendants inspired by Wales, armed with contemporary culture and connected digitally.

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