

Report to the EAAL Committee on the Performance of the Welsh Government's Network of Overseas Offices throughout 2020-21

The following report sets out how the network of international offices responded to the global pandemic by refocusing country plans, adapting roles to meet the demands of Covid-19 and moving to new delivery methods to meet the objectives of the International Strategy and its Action Plans.

As the effects of Covid-19 started to take hold in February/March 2020, the overseas offices were refocused to concentrate on activity that directly related to combatting the pandemic and supporting Welsh citizens who had been stranded overseas. This report covers the 2020-21 period and replaces the regular quarterly reports previously submitted to the Committee. Quarterly reports will resume from 1 April 2021.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

At the start of the pandemic, when it became clear that there was a global race to secure supplies of PPE, our overseas teams worked closely with their contacts in their respective markets to identify potential sources of PPE and secure supplies for Wales. The offices worked with the Life Sciences Hub in Wales, which coordinates the Wales-based procurement of PPE, to identify suppliers and log their interest in supplying masks, gowns and gloves to Wales.

Case Study

Our China offices played a key role in the delivery of PPE machinery from China to Wales¹. The team ensured that machine certification was undertaken in China and worked with a Wales-based company to transport the specialist machinery to Cardiff.

The company now has the capability to make up to one million fluid resistant face masks a day in Wales for the Welsh NHS and healthcare workers.

Repatriation

Our offices worked directly with the UK Government on its global repatriation programme. More than 1.3m British Nationals were overseas when global travel corridors were closed in March 2020. Our overseas teams joined the global consular effort working directly with their embassy and consular colleagues in the FCO Crisis Teams to ensure that requests for assistance were logged, flights were arranged to repatriate British Nationals and, where required, financial support was provided from the UK Government's repatriation fund.

Case Study

The team in India played an instrumental part in ensuring the safe return of a NHS Intensive Care Senior Consultant who was stranded in Bangalore. The Wales-based

¹ <https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2020-05-14/one-million-face-masks-a-day-to-be-made-in-new-cardiff-factory>

International Relations team, which was also supporting the FCO's repatriation programme, was made aware that a senior consultant from Ysbyty Glan Clwyd was in India and had not been able to secure passage back to Wales. Working with the British High Commission in New Delhi, the team in India made contact with the doctor, secured his place on one of the first flights out of Bangalore on 20 April and even phoned him at the airport to ensure that he had made the flight and check on his welfare.

Information Gathering

Throughout the pandemic, the overseas offices have been working with other governments to gather information about their approach to controlling the spread of Covid-19. This has included gathering information on economic measures, social restrictions, returning to schools and financial support. The teams worked with the governments in their host countries as well as some further afield, such as South Korea, to ensure that as much information was gathered as possible and produced comprehensive Covid Comparator reports.

All of this information has been passed to the central TAC teams who deliver the Welsh Government's response to Covid-19, including those in Health, Science, Education and the Economy.

Virtual Activity

While all physical activity has been paused throughout the pandemic, all of the offices have revisited their individual country plans to adapt and, where possible, move to delivering the objectives of the International Strategy through virtual means.

Trade and Investment

One key element of transition for the network has been the move to delivering virtual international trade missions to Welsh exporters. Working with Trade colleagues in Wales, the network of offices has adapted to provide in-market briefings which have led to more focused one-to-one tailored support, enabling Welsh companies to export products and services into market.

The offices have supported more than 110 Welsh companies to identify export opportunities within key overseas markets. The offices have been part of the team that has delivered the following virtual trade missions over the past five months:

- Virtual Export Market Visit to Qatar
- Virtual Exhibition attendance and support at Medtech, Toronto
- Virtual Export Market visit to Japan
- Virtual Exhibition attendance and support at ADIPEC, UAE
- Virtual Export Market Visit to Japan
- Virtual Exhibition attendance and support to Medica, Düsseldorf
- Virtual Construction sector mission, Dubai
- Virtual Exhibition at Ocean Energy, Europe
- Virtual Export Market Visit to China

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Within the past quarter, all offices have refocused efforts to support Welsh exporters across all sectors, from energy and aerospace through to food and drink, as part of the published Export Action Plan.

The opportunity to secure new investment in Wales during the past year has been extremely challenging as many companies have focused on safeguarding existing operations. Over the last 12 months, all offices have reached out to the parent companies and headquarters of existing overseas investors based in Wales to build the relationships and gain intelligence from investors on their future plans for Welsh operations. Many of the investors have re-evaluated global operations in light of the economic impact of the pandemic and a number of investors have been directed through to the Economic Resilience Fund in order to secure the future of the current workforce in Wales.

During 2020, the overseas network undertook in-depth segment analysis reports within their regions aligned to the key Welsh sectors identified in the International Strategy, including compound-semiconductors and cyber security. The reports identified key clusters, organisations and target lists of companies to proactively engage with as part of restart planning. The teams have also reached out to key partners and multipliers in-market and have delivered sector focused webinars on the Welsh proposition to build and amplify the Welsh messages for potential future investment.

Key Activity Undertaken During Q3/4 2020-21

Some of the activities undertaken by the offices are set out below. These illustrate the breadth of delivery undertaken following a return to 'near business as usual' since November 2020:

- The **Ireland** office has worked with counterparts in the Irish Government to develop and agree a Joint Statement and Action Plan. The joint high-level action plan sets out six areas of cooperation, for which the Welsh Government has devolved responsibility. These areas are: Political and Official Engagement; Climate and Sustainability; Trade and Tourism; Education and Research; Culture, Language and Heritage; and, Communities, Diaspora and Sport. The Statement sets out a number of collaborative activities to build and strengthen the relationship between Wales and Ireland in 2021 and beyond. The team has, and continues to, support businesses in Wales and Ireland to navigate the impacts of the EU transition period and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).
- The offices in **Germany** have been focused on delivering a programme of activity to deliver impact through the "Wales in Germany 2021" programme. This is a themed year which showcases the breadth of activity and exchange happening between Wales and Germany in the areas of: commerce; science and innovation; culture and the arts; education; tourism; and, the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

- The **Canada** office has focused on the Aerospace sector and delivered a trade focused webinar to Welsh companies on export opportunities in Quebec and across Canada. The webinar also provided the opportunity to highlight the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) capabilities in Wales to the Canadian audience.
- The offices in the **USA** have worked to deliver an investment project into Wales from a Chicago-headquartered semiconductor company which will see new jobs created in Wales in this key sector. The team has also made introductions and facilitated a collaboration between two universities in Wales and the USA around the field of Cyber Security.
- The office in **Japan** has worked with an investment bank and partners in the region to deliver a webinar on the renewable energy opportunities in Wales. With a strong panel of speakers, over 200 businesses and organisations attended and follow up is ongoing with a number of interested parties. The team also secured the investment of well-established housing developer which has set up its first UK office in Wales.
- The team in **China** has focused on supporting the education sector in Wales and has provided in-market representation which has secured agreements to deliver a number of vocational training programmes which will see Welsh colleges and universities generate investment from China.

In addition to bespoke in-market activity, the overseas teams were also involved in developing the five Action Plans that support the International Strategy to ensure that they align with individual country plans. The Action Plans are:

- Diaspora Engagement
- Priority Regional Relationships and Networks
- International Relations through Public Diplomacy and Soft Power
- Wales and Africa
- Export Action Plan for Wales

Following the launch of the Action Plans towards the end of 2020, each of the offices has been actively involved in identifying Welsh diaspora in their individual markets and, where relevant, working with the newly appointed Welsh Government envoys to identify opportunities for them to represent Wales such as Emerging Tech Fest in the USA and university lectures in Tokyo.

St David's Day

The international network of offices has always delivered a strong programme of physical in-market activities to celebrate St David's Day and the effort to deliver a virtual programme in 2021 is no different. Our International Offices have been instrumental in shaping our St David's Day activity, particularly the Gŵyl Dewi 2021² consumer-facing 72-hour digital celebration showcasing Wales to the World and the global digital events programme – rising to the challenge of delivering virtually. There are business, diaspora and cultural digital events across all of the offices. Highlights

² <https://www.wales.com/gwyl-dewi-wales-celebrates>

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include the second major beat of our Wales in Germany 2021 programme, launching the Wales/Ireland joint statement, a Trade Mission to the Basque Country, events promoting Welsh science and innovation, events with our Welsh Government Envoys, a Q&A with some of our brightest Seren students and a Wales/Ireland Future Generations event – *Small nations, big ambitions: Building Better Tomorrows* – at the UN.