

Conleth Brady & Hannah Macken,
British Irish Relations Unit,
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade,
Iveagh House,
80 St Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.

14/03/2025

Dear Mr Brady and Ms Macken,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the review of the Ireland-Scotland Bilateral Review and the Ireland-Wales Shared Statement.

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 businesses, employing 130,000 people across the city and county. Our vision is to lead a transforming and ambitious Cork City and County. Our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and as a 2024-2025 SDG Champion, all of our public policy positions aim to work in support of these goals.

Our priorities are shaped by our continuous engagement with members, board of directors and stakeholders across the region.

Cork Chamber connects Cork internationally and promotes the city and county for investment, collaboration, talent and trade. Cork has a great opportunity for further growth and development in the coming years.

This development depends on strong international relationships, including those with our near neighbours in Scotland and Wales.

Cork Chamber supports the deepening of political and official engagement between the regions and notes the potential benefits in cooperation in the fields of energy and sustainability, economy and trade, education and research, innovation, and culture and heritage.

This submission emphasises the need for continued cooperation between Ireland and both Scotland and Wales and the benefits of such relationships.

Yours Sincerely,



Conor Healy
CEO

Observations

At Cork Chamber, we work closely with international partners and the diplomatic corps, both at home and abroad, to support the promotion of bilateral trade and international relationship building. We regularly welcome international delegations to Cork and support the work of the Department of Foreign Affairs, The British Embassy in Ireland, The Scottish Government Ireland Office and The Welsh Government Ireland Office in their aims to promote two-way trade between Ireland and the United Kingdom, for business, governments, and communities.

In a changing global environment, strong international relationships are more important than ever and that includes those between Ireland and Scotland, and Ireland and Wales.

This relationship serves to support business and trade, but also presents opportunities for developments in education and research, climate and sustainability actions, cultural and heritage initiatives, and political relationships.

The previous iterations of the Ireland Wales Shared-Statement and the Ireland-Scotland Joint Bilateral Review were based on the strength of the relationships between the nations, based on common heritage and culture, maritime links, and business, sporting, academic and cultural connections.

They noted the importance of consolidating existing ties in the context of a changing international environment and unlocking the further untapped potential in the relationships between Ireland and Scotland, and Ireland and Wales.

It also noted the shared aims of advancing equality and sustainability. This remains at the core of Cork Chamber's strategy and underpins all of our policy positions.

The evolving relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom has reinforced the importance of strong links between the neighbouring jurisdictions on these islands, and the challenging global environment which has emerged in recent years has further served to emphasise this importance. Cork Chamber welcomes the positive Joint Statement following the UK- Ireland Summit in March and hopes that this will lead to greater cooperation between regions in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

In recent times Cork Chamber has worked with the Scottish and Welsh Government in Ireland on events such as:

- Ireland Wales Forum 2022
- Ireland Wales Forum 2024
- Advancing the Offshore Wind Opportunity: Bridging Irish and Scottish Perspectives
- EEN Virtual Mission: Offshore Wind - Ireland and the UK
- Innovating rail through international collaboration
- Joining the Dots - Cork - Retrofitting and Skills

Political and Official Engagement

Cork Chamber supports the previously outlined aims of increasing high level visits and continuing engagement between senior political staff. It is noted that the 2025 St Patrick's Day international programme includes delegations to both Cardiff and Edinburgh.

We would also note the recent Ireland-Wales Forum, which took place in October 2024 at the Munster Technological University campus in Bishopstown, Cork. This focused on fostering

academic and research links, but also provided the opportunity for political engagement and such opportunities remain important.

The benefits of continued political engagement can be viewed across a range of sectors. On March 7, 2025, a meeting between the Welsh Cabinet Secretary for Transport Ken Skates and Ireland's Minister of State for International & Road Transport, Logistics, Rail & Ports Seán Canney took place to discuss plans for the resilience of the crossings between Ireland and Wales, crossings which are crucial from a trade and tourism perspective.

This meeting was designed to discuss terms of reference for a taskforce to safeguard these crossings, including resilience, contingency planning and future developments. The storm damage at the Port of Holyhead in December and its impact on trade and shipments in Ireland for the subsequent weeks underline the importance of this taskforce and serve as a strong example of the need for continued and regular political engagement at the highest levels.

Climate and Sustainability

Cork has been designated an EU mission city for climate neutrality to 2030. The transition to a more sustainable and climate-resilient city and region will lay the foundations for sustainable economic development and improved quality of life. Our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and as a 2024-2025 SDG Champion, all of our public policy positions aim to work in support of these goals.

Ireland, including the Cork region, has immense potential to grow its renewable energy sector. This presents significant economic opportunities for the country as well as benefits in our climate and sustainability goals.

Cork Chamber notes that cooperation in climate and sustainability was central to the 2021-2025 Ireland-Scotland Bilateral Review and the Ireland-Wales Shared Statement. Joint work that supports sustainable development through climate adaptation and mitigation, green growth and the transition to net zero carbon and a circular economy are all prioritised in the previous documents and Cork Chamber urges these elements to be central to future versions of these agreements too.

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 which would benefit Ireland, Scotland and Wales in a significant way.

In 2024, Cork Chamber founded the Cork Offshore Renewable Industry Forum (CORIF), an initiative which brings together representatives of the offshore renewables sector in Cork to advocate for key policy and infrastructure enablers to capitalise on offshore renewables.

Despite this being a regional grouping, it recognises the importance of national and international cooperation in capitalising on the existing infrastructure and developing additional supports to fully capitalise on realising the full potential of renewable sources, such as wind and wave.

Cork Chamber would encourage the prioritising of the deepening of business connections, and the cooperation of research and development of offshore renewable energy technologies.

Cork Chamber has worked closely with The British Embassy in Ireland, The Scottish Government Ireland Office and The Welsh Government Ireland Office to organise offshore renewables events such as those listed above. Cork Chamber's ability to bring together

businesses, academia and stakeholders from the region to network, exchange ideas and find avenues of collaboration if crucial for building relationships between Cork and Scotland and Wales. Cork Chamber is a resource that the Irish Government should be utilising more in building relations between Cork and regions in the United Kingdom, including Scotland and Wales,

International Financial Services

Ireland is now recognised as a significant global financial centre and the international financial services sector has never been more important to the Irish economy, with more than 50,000 people working in the sector. Cork is Ireland's second-largest financial services centre and is home to a significant cluster of businesses representing a broad spectrum of financial services disciplines.

The Cork Financial Services Forum was established to drive the advancement of the financial services industry in the region. It is comprised of businesses and financial services sector organisations, as well as local agencies that support the development of economic growth.

Research from Cork Chamber Skillnet identified the potential for Cork to become a leading European destination for International Financial Services. The report found that there is a need for balanced regional development and said that Cork could leverage its position as a lower-cost location than Dublin with a highly-skilled workforce to attract such development.

It likened the relationship between Cork and Dublin to that of Edinburgh and London, where Edinburgh has capitalised on opportunities arising from the overflow of business that London either cannot or chooses not to service due to cost or capacity constraints.

There is an opportunity for Cork and Edinburgh to collaborate, share resources, and learnings from these relationships to develop and enhance the IFS industry in both cities.

Education & Research

Cork Chamber supports the existing and continued education and research relationships between Ireland, Welsh, and Scottish institutions.

Cork is home to two universities – UCC and MTU – and several other actors in the further education sector. World class facilities such as MaRei and the National Maritime College of Ireland are based in Cork and present opportunities not just for local and national growth, but international development too.

To date, more than a dozen Cork-based projects have been funded and progressed under the Ireland-Wales Fund, including research into climate change, the waters off the Irish and Welsh coasts, and life sciences, among others.

Furthermore, Cork Chamber also recognises the potential for shared heritage and cultural learnings. Ireland, Scotland, and Wales share the challenges and experience of operating with minority languages within wider bilingual communities.

The shared experience of Gaelscoileanna, Welsh medium schools, and facilities operating in Scots Gaelic presents opportunities for learnings and growth.

Cork Chamber would support increased cooperation between ministers and departments of education and schools, especially when it comes to digital platforms, language and culture, and notes the potential benefits of further cultural exchanges in years to come.

Case Study: Tri-region partnership

Cork Chamber has worked together with Dublin Chamber and Northern Ireland Chambers to champion initiatives that will benefit the island as a whole. Two trade missions, including delegations of business leaders, key stakeholders and politicians, have taken place, one in Belfast and one in Dublin, with a third to take place in Cork later this year.

The series marks the first collaborative effort of its kind and demonstrates the potential benefits of cooperation between regional stakeholders, potentially offering a blueprint for further partnerships between Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

In the case of the tri-region partnership, key initiatives including higher-speed rail between Cork, Dublin, Belfast and beyond, the restoration of Cork to Belfast flights, and improved funding allocation for the three major ports have been prioritised.

All-island innovation clusters and enhanced tourism links have also been on the agendas for the previous two delegations.

For Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the tri-region partnership can be used as an example of work that can be undertaken between the regions, in particular when it comes to a focus on deepening political links, improving air and sea links, enhancing the tourism offering, and working together to better the educational, research and trade collaborations between the regions.

Case Study: Joining the Dots

A further example of this is Joining the Dots, a programme that promotes economic development in Irish and UK regions through the sharing of best practices by local policy efforts. The aim is to identify common challenges and explore solutions and opportunities for growth. Beginning in 2018, the event has been hosted in more than 10 different locations, including Cork and Glasgow.

Initiatives such as Joining the Dots and the tri-region partnership should be encouraged, supported and resourced as they provide vital opportunities for collaboration, information-sharing and learning.

Recommendations

- Prioritise increased trade links between Ireland, Scotland and Wales amid a changing global landscape
- Focus on shared research and resources, especially in the area of climate change and energy initiatives

- Continue to develop political relationships at the highest levels, including regular meetings of senior ministers and their counterparts
- Implement more regular and stronger links between Irish ports and airports and their counterparts in Scotland and Wales
- Re-establish direct flights between Cork and Wales for tourism and business opportunities
- Conduct further cultural exchanges, including in the areas of language, sport and the arts