



Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [International Representation and Promotion of Wales by UK bodies](#), HC 337

Tuesday 1 July 2014

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [British Council](#)
- [VisitBritain](#)

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Members present: David T. C. Davies (Chair); Guto Bebb; Geraint Davies; Glyn Davies; Jonathan Edwards; Nia Griffith; Simon Hart; Mrs Siân C. James; Jessica Morden;

Questions 228-302

Witnesses: **Jenny Scott**, Director, British Council Wales, and **Simon Dancey**, Global Director Cultural Skills, British Council, gave evidence.

Chair: Good morning. Thank you very much for coming in this morning. I think we have all met before and we know a bit of what you are about, but we appreciate that you have come in today to give formal evidence to the Committee and we are grateful to you for that. Some members may want to try to speak at Justice questions, so forgive me if I have to race things along a little, or if I cut anyone short. It is not to be taken personally. I will start with Jessica Morden.

Q228 Jessica Morden: Hello again. Can you kick off by briefly explaining a bit about the British Council—what you do, what your role is and how the British Council Wales fits into that?

Jenny Scott: The British Council is the UK's cultural relations organisation. We work to build trust and to create opportunities for people in the UK and overseas. The aim is to create a safer, more prosperous world. Each year we deal with millions of people. Our aim is to share the UK's cultural assets—education, the arts and the English language—and to encourage people to visit the UK, to study in the UK and to do business with the UK. We have 191 offices; we are in 110 countries around the world and we have been operating for 80 years. We believe that our work represents a plurality of the UK—sharing the best of cultural assets in the UK.

The British Council Wales is an integral part of our global network. Our role there is to build international profile and partnerships for Wales. We work very closely with our regional offices across the world and with our partners in Wales to project the best of Welsh education, to develop collaborations and partnerships on the arts side and to ensure that Wales benefits from the British Council's global education and arts programmes.

Q229 Jessica Morden: Obviously you have a very broad remit. How do you measure whether or not it has been a success?

Jenny Scott: That depends. We have an overall assessment process for the British Council, which brings together and aggregates all the figures. In terms of our own programmes, we look at programme level. We look at participation rates at a programme level and at feedback that we get. We then aggregate those figures up to give a global total for the British Council. We ask for feedback from participants and the partners we work with. For example, last year we had an annual impact survey; 90% of respondents said that they felt the British Council had contributed or significantly contributed to the development of their own programmes and partnerships. There is work on the international partnerships side.

Q230 Chair: In terms of promoting Wales specifically, what would you say Wales's strengths are? Would you actually say that you promote Wales specifically? Presumably you do, but what do you focus on to emphasise the fact that Wales is slightly different from the rest of the United Kingdom? I am picking on you a bit, Ms Scott, but Simon Dancey should feel free to come in as well if he wants to—whoever wants to answer.

Simon Dancey: It is about trying to see where we can add value. It has to be about added value for the British Council as well. Wales is a multiplicity of things, but there are also really unique areas, particularly around language and our culture in Wales. We have a distinct way of articulating that culture, with the language. My background is particularly working within the cultural sector, so that is the area I know best. Similarly, with education, we try to see where the British Council can add value and where we can help to aggregate our work and have an impact. We are looking very keenly at the distinct nature of Wales and seeing how we can promote that around the world.

Jenny Scott: Within our areas, it is around education, particularly the strengths of higher education in Wales. That is evidenced by the fact that 25,000 international students come to Wales every year. We are able to focus on areas such as engineering and technology and the cultural industries, which are a particular strength for Wales, that fall within our remit—areas we can work with internationally and where we can encourage international links.

Q231 Chair: You may be aware that some of the people who have come in have spoken about the importance of having a brand, and have come forward with various suggestions. Do you think that is important? If so, what kind of brand do you think Wales has and should have?

Jenny Scott: For me, it depends on the different markets and on different people's areas of interest. If you look at the Europe market, Wales is seen very positively within Europe. That is helped by activities such as international student recruitment—50% of the international students who come to Wales come from Europe—and the mobility programmes that we run. It depends on the different markets and the different strength of the brand.

We have been working with the Welsh Government on new markets such as China, Brazil and India. Through cultural relations, we are looking to develop relationships with partners and institutions in particular areas. For example, we are working in Chongqing in south-west China, where there is a Welsh office that has a Welsh further and higher education member of staff. There is development of those links, both through education and through culture, through museum links and so on. The aim is to have a sustainable relationship—to build the long-term partnerships that, hopefully, will lead to economic partnerships in the future. That is the way we are looking to promote it.

Q232 Geraint Davies: If I were a Chinese person living in that region, why should I want particularly to go to Wales as opposed to another part of Britain, for instance? Isn't it the case that, to a certain extent, the British Council, by the nature of British history, is overwhelmed by English issues surrounding the history of Britain, not Welsh ones?

Simon Dancey: It is the uniqueness. When I deal internationally and talk about Wales, as somebody coming from Wales, it is about articulating what we have that is different. Our history is part of the UK's history but it is also different. We have a history of bilingualism. The whole cultural sector is very different as well. The history of trade relations in Wales also informs who we are, so we can offer a unique proposition internationally.

It is not always about the big. For example, if you are talking to somebody in Chongqing or in Rio, as I do, who wants to work with the British Museum or the Tate, you can say, "Hang on a minute. It could be of more use to you to work with St Fagans or with the Blaenau Ffestiniog slate mine, because it has a very distinct match with what you are looking for." The strength of Wales is uniqueness and the differences that we have within our culture. For me, it is a strength for the British Council to be able to make sure that that is fed into all of our programmes at all times.

Q233 Geraint Davies: If I am from Chongqing and have been told, "Come to Wales," but I do not know where to go, what would you say? Why should I come to Wales as a brand?

Simon Dancey: Last year we brought over a load of museum curators specifically from Chongqing to Wales—they came. The reason they wanted to come was that we were doing exciting work that was not being done in other parts of the UK. Our job is to demonstrate the strength and uniqueness of Welsh culture internationally. As long as we are across that brief and we know what is happening in Wales, I can say with some authority, "Look, this museum is doing particularly interesting work that fits very well with what you are looking to do. It is a much better fit than if you go to the British Museum again and again and again."

Jenny Scott: We find particularly through the partnerships and links we have built up with Chongqing that it is an issue of trust. What we have found, and what research has shown, is that the more interaction young people have with people from the UK and people from Wales, the more trust is built up. We know that the greater the number of activities they are involved with, the more likely they are to want to come and study in Wales. You build up that partnership and trust. People see that the quality is there as well. We benefit from being part of the UK higher education system, because of the quality and currency that it has across the world, but we are able then to demonstrate the unique strengths and benefits of Wales.

Q234 Mrs James: Thank you very much for the welcome that we had when we came to your offices. We met some really interesting people, so diolch yn fawr. You say in your evidence that you work with many organisations to ensure that your programmes are “attuned to the needs, strategies and expertise of Wales.” Can you give us some practical examples of that? You have already mentioned the curators, but could you give another example?

Jenny Scott: You can look at some of our education programmes. For example, we have a professional development programme for teachers and head teachers. Part of that programme is to get them to look at different education models and to share best practice. We heard recently that some teachers had been out to Washington for a visit, on a peer-to-peer exchange sharing of best practice. Because people were really impressed by the models that the Welsh teachers showed their American counterparts on that visit, they were asked to come back to speak at a conference in the States—effectively, to share that best practice. We see examples where that is a real strength.

Simon Dancey: My job is to link cultural institutions in the UK around the globe, so I represent not just Wales but the whole of the UK. We have just finished a major piece of research looking back at the UK to identify where our key assets and strengths are, including in Wales, so that when I go to Singapore I can look to match up institutions from Wales with institutions from Singapore. It is about evidence-based work. It is not just anecdotal: “We think there is a need around x.” We have actually conducted UK-wide research around where the strengths are, and that helps us to play Wales into the wider UK when we are looking to develop partnerships.

Q235 Mrs James: Obviously, you work for the British Council in general in the UK and the British Council in Wales. How much autonomy do you get? How much freedom do you get within that to develop your own links?

Simon Dancey: From the top down, it is a UK organisation, and it is important that the voices of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland are heard within that organisation. We make sure that that voice is heard clearly. Nobody is saying, “You can’t do x, y and z”—that is not the way the organisation is put together. Going back to your question, it is about looking at where the needs, the demands and the opportunities are. If we can demonstrate through research that there are great institutions and opportunities in Wales and that we can bring benefit to people and institutions in Wales, we are free to do that.

Jenny Scott: In terms of autonomy, there are very few things that we do on our own; in fact, I cannot think of any. We work with partners in Wales, so part of our brief and

our remit is to make sure that we know what our partners want to do. What we are doing now—this is probably the right time to do it, since I have come into post and we are now looking forward—is talking with the Welsh Government and asking, “What regions are you interested in?” We are talking with our partners—Wales Arts International and the Arts Council—and asking, “Looking forward over the next two to three years, where are some of the markets? What are you interested in doing internationally? In what areas are you looking to work?” to see where we can align that, so that we can bring things together and collaborate. Hopefully, we will then have something that is more than the sum of its parts.

Q236 Mrs James: The big link to make is the opportunity to bring in students to study. Obviously that is an important part of your work, but you have also mentioned the cultural side of it—hooking people in through culture and through the academic organisations you work with. Some of the evidence that we have taken has been from organisations such as Welsh National Opera, which have not been so happy. What is your response to that? How do you identify and decide whom you are going to fund?

Simon Dancey: We are not directly a funding organisation. As Jenny was saying, we are about developing partnerships. It is about where we can add value. If we can add value to an organisation, an institution or individuals and can help to scale up their internationalisation, that is what we do. It is not just about working with people for the sake of working with people; it has to be to add value. The first thing we do on the cultural side of things is to look at research, to evidence-base what we are doing so that we can back that up. Then we look for key partners we can work with, often to co-invest to create programmes where we can work together.

Jenny Scott: Part of the time, people still expect us to be able to fund and produce activity. We simply cannot do that. For example, in our work with the Edinburgh festival, every two years we do a showcase. We do not produce anything; what we do is select 30 arts companies and events to showcase at Edinburgh. We bring in 200 international delegates who want to plan activity and to programme performances in their own country. In a sense, we are a cultural broker, rather than a funder. I think that sometimes people forget that, so they can be quite disappointed when we say, “We are sorry, but we cannot fund.”

Q237 Mrs James: Do you think that organisations in Wales are utilising you as much as they should or as successfully as they could?

Jenny Scott: There is always room for improvement, and there is always more that we can do to work with partners. The answer is, yes, we hope so, and the feedback that we get suggests that, but we can always do more.

Q238 Jonathan Edwards: I want to ask you some questions about your work with the Welsh Government. You have already mentioned the special relationship that has been developed with Chongqing in China and you have given some examples of the work there. How do you measure the effectiveness of that work? Why was Chongqing chosen? What is the strategic reason for that partnership?

Simon Dancey: It predates us by a long, long time. We inherited that relationship; the Welsh Government made that decision many years ago.

Jenny Scott: China is a huge emerging market. Most countries want a part of that business. The Welsh Government have been clever in focusing on a specific area and spending time on building up those relationships, because you cannot deal with a country of that size in any other way. We are now seeing that through their work on the 2015 UK year of culture in Mexico. We know that the Welsh Government will have a trade mission out there, so we will make sure that there are some Welsh performers performing during that year. The work that we have done with the Welsh Government specifically has been on building up that type of activity through cultural relations.

Q239 Jonathan Edwards: Based on that answer, should promoting Welsh culture lead to a tangible benefit in terms of economic success in Wales and tourism, or is it just a noble thing?

Jenny Scott: If we look at the 25,000 international students in Wales, at the moment the largest group is from China. We see those things following on. Generally you see a direct benefit in terms of—

Simon Dancey: There are direct links with cultural institutions as well. There are institutions where we are plugging into work internationally that are benefiting financially from what we are doing. It is not just about pure artistic activity, important as that is; it is about cultural institutions and commerce as well. It is about skills, training and where culture meets up with education. It is of benefit to those areas as well.

Q240 Jonathan Edwards: Would you say that we are punching above our weight in terms of attracting foreign students?

Jenny Scott: Yes, we are. Recently I looked at the figures; 19% of higher education students in Wales are international, which is a large percentage. Only Scotland has a slightly higher percentage. We have a higher percentage of international students per head of population than England. At the moment, even with the rough figures, they are bringing income of over £0.5 billion into Wales every year, so there is huge economic benefit. That is an area you want to grow, because we know there is huge demand for education. The more we can work internationally, link up and get those relationships built, the more we will be able to attract international students.

Q241 Jonathan Edwards: Lastly, based on your relationship with the Welsh Government in terms of joint work, to what extent do you think that overseas promotion is a priority for them?

Simon Dancey: I think it is a priority. Across Departments, from the First Minister's office to the Culture Minister and education, a common theme that runs through their work is that they want to be more strategic and to work with organisations such as the British Council to help to aggregate that work.

Jenny Scott: The Welsh Government provided half of the funding—£180,000—for our international programme for the Dylan Thomas centenary, “Starless and Bible Black.” They match-funded it. They have provided funding for us to work with them in Patagonia. The director of external relations is on the Wales advisory committee and is working with us to ensure that we are aware of what is happening. We have frequent meetings to look at what areas they are interested in developing.

Q242 Nia Griffith: I apologise for not having been able to be on the visit in Cardiff, owing to a meeting with a Minister in the Welsh Government. When we were out in Patagonia, we had the opportunity to see some of the work that is going on there with Welsh language and culture. How do you evaluate the success of that work? How successful do you think the Welsh language project in Chubut has been?

Jenny Scott: We evaluate it in a number of ways. We look at the numbers of language students. The number of learners of Welsh there has doubled since we started managing the programme. We also look at the willingness of partners to contribute to funding it. It has funding from Menter Patagonia, which is based there, and from the Wales-Argentina Society; the British Council also puts in its own funding. We look at the feedback that we get in terms of how much the programme is appreciated there, particularly at a Government level, and at input from the Government. The Government recently recognised a Welsh-medium school there—a bilingual school. When they recognise a school, they pay for the teachers for that school.

Those are some of the aspects we would look at to determine whether or not the programme has been successful, rather than just the pure numbers. Around the upcoming 150th anniversary celebrations, there is huge interest among organisations and societies in Patagonia in celebrating that cultural heritage. Those are the factors that we look at, other than the pure numbers, when saying that the programme is successful.

Q243 Nia Griffith: Could you elaborate a little on the funding? How secure is funding for Welsh language and cultural projects? Do you think that eventually it will be self-sustaining and the British Council will no longer need to fund it, or will there be a continuing need to fund it?

Jenny Scott: The programme is funded primarily by the Welsh Government. We put in funding, and there is funding from the Wales-Argentina Society. Menter Patagonia funds students from Argentina to travel to Wales to study. The programme is funded through a contract that we have with the Welsh Government; that contract is up for renewal at the end of March 2015. We have started to have discussions with the Government about whether the programme will roll over, because of the elections; they are not entirely sure whether they want to go through a tender process next year, so we are still having discussions with them about that.

In terms of future funding, it is hard to tell. If there is greater tourism or more commerce or business with Patagonia, potentially you could look for sponsors. My impression at the moment is that it will be a while before that is likely to start, so for the moment it might struggle without Government funding. Hopefully there will be an opportunity over the coming years, through tourism and perhaps through business

links, to get sponsorship for the programme to help to make it self-sustaining. That is my view.

Q244 Nia Griffith: To go back to the celebrations next year, which you touched on, could you tell us what discussions you have been having with the Welsh Government or other organisations either here or in Argentina about the anniversary celebrations? How well co-ordinated do you think those activities are?

Jenny Scott: Recently we were asked by the Welsh Government to take on a co-ordinating role for the celebrations on their behalf, to work with organisations in Wales that are looking to plan activity in Argentina. We are working very closely with our office in Argentina and the embassy there. We are also bringing information about what is planned on the ground in Argentina. The Government have agreed funding for the next two years, which the British Council will match-fund. We are starting to look at co-ordinating that and making sure that information is available online.

Simon Dancey: We brought together the people who were initially involved in that process. We spoke to the Argentine ambassador to the UK and our ambassador to Argentina and brought them into a round table to try to co-ordinate and bring value, where we are all pushing in the same direction around this.

Q245 Nia Griffith: Would you be the first port of call if we want to know what will be happening?

Jenny Scott: Yes, absolutely, although you may want to wait a few months. We have been asked to set up an advisory board now, working with key organisations that have an interest in the celebrations, to start to put markers in the ground for activity that is going to happen and where it is going to happen, so that we can start to pull the information together and share it among organisations.

Q246 Nia Griffith: Will you be visiting the Patagonia tent at the Eisteddfod in Llanelli in August?

Jenny Scott: Yes, I hope so.

Q247 Geraint Davies: We have mentioned Patagonia, but there are various organisations like the North American festival of Wales. To what extent do you support that organisation and others?

Jenny Scott: We have tended not to work through smaller organisations, partly because the type of programmes that we have tend to involve working with schools, universities or arts organisations. The area where we have worked through organisations like that is Patagonia. We have not done it elsewhere, to my knowledge.

Q248 Geraint Davies: If a network of Welsh-branded organisations was springing up, where there might be Welsh populations trying to celebrate being Welsh—or whatever they are doing—would you try to link up with those and support them in some sense, or not really?

Jenny Scott: Probably not, partly because there is not some sort of organised format. You could spend a lot of time and effort trying to do that at the expense, perhaps, of working through school or university networks. However, if we had an idea of the scale of it, which I do not, it could be exploited through something like social media; I expect that the organisations are using social media to promote it. That might be a more cost-effective way of linking them in, but we have not worked with them.

Q249 Geraint Davies: In principle, you could set up some sort of social media hub, couldn't you, to invite people to network, share ideas and things like that?

Jenny Scott: Off the top of my head, I am not sure.

Q250 Geraint Davies: Do you know whether or not Welsh is taught at universities outside Wales—in Poland, Japan or places like that? Is Welsh taught elsewhere?

Jenny Scott: Yes. I understand that it is taught in some places in the States and in Poland, but that is not something I have details on.

Q251 Geraint Davies: The two of us who represent Swansea have a particular interest in Dylan Thomas. We have the Dylan Thomas centenary this year and there is a lot of activity going on around that. Do you feel that it has been promoted sufficiently outside Wales to get more tourist traffic and economic benefit? Can it be translated into a long-term legacy, to Wales's benefit, or will it be a bit like grandma's birthday, when everyone has a good time but forgets it, and people elsewhere on the road didn't know that it was happening?

Jenny Scott: If you look at the activity around Dylan Thomas, it is around building partnerships. For example, it is being done through arts festivals and literary festivals, where it is not just about Dylan Thomas but about Welsh authors and artists going out to promote their own work as well as doing tributes to Dylan Thomas. It is about looking both at the cultural heritage side and at people promoting their own work.

Q252 Geraint Davies: Dylan Thomas is a global brand. Earlier you mentioned that you broker talent for the Edinburgh festival. Do you think there is an opportunity to build a Dylan Thomas festival that is all-singing and dancing—with a Welsh colour and taste, obviously, and with Dylan Thomas as the centrepiece—but with a more inclusive environment, with people from Bollywood and elsewhere coming to Swansea, in particular, and the Laugharne area for a week a year, so that it is the place to be in the cultural calendar? Is that something we could build?

Jenny Scott: It would certainly be interesting to look at what we do now, following the links that have been made. The programme has been active in Canada, the USA, Argentina and Australia, and India, in October, so it has had quite a wide international reach. We will want to evaluate that and then look at what comes next, rather than say immediately what we want to do, because we are literally in the middle of the programme. We will want to take feedback from partners and people we have worked with and ask them what we should do next. At an academic level, we have seen a lot of interest in work in this area, particularly in Canada, but we will need to get some feedback and evaluate.

Q253 Geraint Davies: Do you feel that there was positive participation or engagement with tour operators to bring people to Wales during the Dylan Thomas centenary? Obviously events were planned, but the concern is that it was all about events planning—people hoped that spontaneously the world would know about this and would arrive to celebrate it—and perhaps we did not take full advantage of the opportunities to bring in outside people to stimulate the economy. Do you think that is true, or not?

Jenny Scott: I am not sure. The majority of our work has been about trying to stimulate international partnerships and activity in the countries concerned. It has not necessarily focused on bringing people back to Wales.

Q254 Simon Hart: Can we go back for a second to the devolution settlement and the relationship between Cardiff and London? Do you think that UK Ministers understand sufficiently the detail of the devolution settlement? Does their understanding have a positive or negative impact on the work that you are trying to do?

Simon Dancey: Could you repeat the question?

Simon Hart: I will start again from the beginning, although I will make it shorter this time. Relationship between Cardiff and London: do UK Ministers understand the devolution settlement, and does that understanding have an impact, positive or negative, on the work that you are trying to do?

Simon Dancey: It is an interesting question. Our job as the British Council is to talk both to Ministers in the UK Government and to Assembly Members at Cardiff Bay. While we are not responsible for what their understanding of devolution is, our job is to make it very clear that we are there to represent the interests of the people of Wales and to try to make sure that we are as joined up as possible with opportunities presented by policy, whether that is policy coming through Westminster or policy coming through Cardiff Bay. From the British Council's point of view, it is about having a clear dialogue around what we are doing. Obviously, culture is devolved, but we are still very careful to make sure that we are talking to DCMS and various Ministers here at Westminster. From the British Council's point of view, it is about having clear dialogue with all partners.

Q255 Simon Hart: You mentioned that culture is devolved. How can you devolve culture? You cannot really devolve culture, can you? If you are the UK Government and you are trying to promote the UK, you cannot say, "That bit belongs to a different jurisdiction". That is not how it's going to work, is it?

Simon Dancey: I cannot comment on that. We work with the devolved Administrations on the briefs that they have. We work with the Culture Minister in Wales around his brief. We also work here with DCMS around the briefs that they have. You just have to see how the two things fit in with each other. In one sense, we work with the hand that we are dealt. It is for the UK Government and the Welsh Assembly Government to make decisions about how they want to administer culture within their portfolio.

Simon Hart: Jenny, do you agree with every word?

Jenny Scott: I do.

Q256 Simon Hart: My second question, which crops up from time to time and causes frustration for some of us, is about the extent of the geographical awareness of staff of institutions like the British Council. Could you put your hand on your heart and tell us honestly that your own staff have sufficiently detailed knowledge of the geography of Wales to make sensible judgments? I am probably speaking out of turn, but I find it incredibly frustrating when our own Ministers and our own Government do not necessarily understand that there is a difference between Caernarfon and Carmarthen, for example. They think it is an hour's drive, and stuff like that. It makes our life quite difficult.

Simon Dancey: We represent the UK. To do that properly, you need to understand the constituency you are representing. From the British Council's point of view, it has to be completely commensurate with what Wales looks like—the geography of Wales and the culture of Wales—otherwise you cannot do the job properly. I am quite lucky; I run a global programme for the British Council, based in Wales. The British Council is committed to running something from Barry, which is near enough to Cardiff. A large number of the staff I employ, working on global programmes, are based in Wales. They are from Wales as well, and that is feeding into the British Council more generally. I know that the same is true in Scotland and Northern Ireland. We have to know what we are doing. We have to understand the geography, the culture and the politics of the area that we are representing, otherwise we cannot do our job properly.

Jenny Scott: It is up to us to make sure that colleagues both in the UK and overseas are aware of the increasing differences and the distinctiveness of things like Welsh education and Welsh culture, particularly on the education side, where things are diverging more and more. Our role is to make sure that they are aware of those changes and that we keep them up to date on what is happening.

Simon Dancey: And we feed back to our own colleagues to make sure they are clear.

Q257 Simon Hart: Earlier you talked about added value. In your answer just now you spoke about doing your job properly. How does a taxpayer assess whether you are doing your job properly? Where is the measurement of success? I am sure there is one, but where could we look?

Jenny Scott: It depends on different programmes. If you are asking about people within Wales, I could say that in Monmouth we work with 20 schools, and in Ceredigion we work with 35 schools and two higher education institutions. We are able to give detail and data at that level to say, "These are the schools we are working with. These are the higher education institutions we are working with. These are the arts organisations we work with. This is the number of people—pupils, teachers and head teachers—we have involved and who are participating in our programmes. This is the feedback that we have had from them." Good, bad or indifferent, we collect that feedback, so we are able to give a picture of our activity and our work.

Q258 Chair: Do you find that your relationship with Welsh Assembly Ministers is as good as it should be, or do you get the feeling that you are sometimes seen as a UK organisation trying to do something that they see as being firmly within their own remit?

Simon Dancey: I would probably say the opposite, to be honest with you. Most Welsh Assembly Ministers have been very keen to see how they can benefit from working with the British Council—holding us to account, as you are, to make sure that we are representing Wales as fully as we possibly can. It is really about what we can do for Welsh institutions and individuals. That is the pressure that will come through, whichever Ministry you are talking to in the Welsh Government.

Jenny Scott: Recently we have been involved in an inquiry looking at European-funded programmes and the benefit that Wales had from those programmes. The Assembly has been very interested in seeing what benefit Wales derived from those and, looking forward, what they can expect to get out of the new programme.

Q259 Jessica Morden: In some of the evidence we have had, there was a bit of a complaint about cultural organisations not being invited on some UKTI trade delegations. The Arts Council of Wales said that their English counterparts had been invited, but they had not. How well do you work with UKTI? What is your view of their cultural awareness?

Simon Dancey: The British Council has just drawn up a new agreement with UKTI, in one sense to address some of the points that you have just made, and I think it will be ratified in the next week or two. It is about working much more closely, with the British Council and UKTI meeting much more regularly, making sure that they get synergy between the work they are doing, and making sure that they are representing the whole of the UK and are not focused just around London. There was awareness that things could be better, and the British Council started working more closely with UKTI. I am taking over that relationship, as of the week after next, to drive it forward. It is about making sure that we are clear about what UKTI is doing and what the British Council is doing, but also that we are clear that we are representing the whole of the UK.

Q260 Jessica Morden: I want to go back to Simon Hart's point about awareness of Wales within the British Council. On your board of trustees, you have a rotating place for someone from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Is there a case for having a permanent Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish person?

Jenny Scott: We have a Wales advisory committee; it is the same in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The UK regional director sits on that committee, so any concerns can be fed through to our management board through the regional director. If you look at the make-up of the board of trustees, there are 15 trustees and four are from devolved Administrations—from Scotland and Wales. At the moment we feel that that revolving post, which is committed to having a chair represented, is a good way of ensuring that any concerns are fed through directly to the board of trustees, but there are also other ways of feeding concerns through to our management board or to our executive board, either through me or through the UK regional director.

Chair: There are no further questions. Thank you very much for coming in today.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Patricia Yates**, Strategy and Communications Director, VisitBritain, and **David Bishop**, Head of Strategy, VisitBritain, gave evidence.

Chair: Good morning. Thank you both very much for coming in today. I ask Geraint Davies to start, please.

Q261 Geraint Davies: I understand that the number of international tourists to the UK has increased since 2009, but the number visiting Wales has declined over the same period. Why do you think that is?

Patricia Yates: I think the figures you are looking at end in 2012. It is a different story in 2013. Post the recession, we saw a decline in international visitors for all of Britain. Last year was the first year when we saw a reversal; indeed, we saw an increase in visits to Wales as well. The real success story has been holiday visits, where Wales outperformed the rest of the UK. Last year we saw holiday visits increase by 13%, and by 27% in value.

If you drill down into the numbers for Wales, you get some understanding of what the issues are. If you look at the inbound markets, Ireland was traditionally the most valuable market for Wales; it has halved in value since 2009, going from a market that was worth £50 million to a market that is now worth £25 million. That is a big driver for Wales. It is a market we are not active in.

You have seen the German market increase, with really strong growth from there. The American market has grown very well for Wales, at a time when the American market is in decline for the whole of Britain. The underlying understanding is that those inbound figures are really driven by the collapse of the Irish market.

Q262 Geraint Davies: Can I ask you something quite different? I understand from looking at the Russian “Business Correspondent”—which, I accept, is not widely read in this Committee—that there are big problems in Russia, in particular. Visa applications, which used to take 10 days, and still do throughout Europe, now take six weeks in Britain, so we are looking at cuts of something like 20% in numbers from Russia. Russian people spend about £1,200 each; they are talking about the British economy losing about £50 million from that segment. What big problems are you facing due to problems with procedures for issuing visas, and delays?

David Bishop: Visas are issued by UK Visas and Immigration. By and large, worldwide they have a very good level of service. As I understand it, the issue in Russia is that very recently they changed the service provider for visa application centres out there and they are having teething difficulties. They assure us that those are being got a grip on. Anecdotally, as you say, there is some feedback that there are some quite significant impacts as a result of that, in terms of the number of Russian visitors coming to the UK, but it has not yet fed through into the statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics that we see month on month. It is something we are very alert to, and we are working with UKVI and the British travel trade to overcome it.

It is probably worth flagging up that in February and March next year we have a new travel trade event. We will be bringing Russian buyers—the Russian travel trade—into the UK to showcase what we have to offer them. Specifically, we will be taking large numbers of people from the Russian travel trade to north Wales as part of that. We are alive to the difficulties and we already have things in hand that we hope will be able to counteract them, once the visa process is up and running.

Q263 Geraint Davies: You are confident that the visa issue is a teething thing, not a problem of overall cuts, and that it is not being replicated in China and so on.

David Bishop: No, it is absolutely not being replicated in China. As I understand it, it is a very specific issue relating to the changeover in the service provider.

Q264 Geraint Davies: What do you think the current strengths and weaknesses of the tourism industry in Wales are in terms of international tourists? How are they differentiated from England?

Patricia Yates: Wales has real strengths internationally. It has its castles, its countryside and its culture. If you look at markets like Germany and the Nordics, that is understood. The barriers to travelling are much more practical; they are about distance, time and driving on the wrong side of the road. It is about overcoming those more practical barriers.

If you go longer haul, Wales is not so well understood. London is a brand that is known internationally, but if you go outside London, longer-haul international visitors do not know the rest of the UK as well as we would like. We are competing fiercely with other tourist boards. Looking at which people are most likely to travel to the UK and what product we have that would fit with them is a key part of our work. What we need from the Welsh industry is for it to work with us on that fit. We know international markets, and Visit Wales knows what the product is; it is about getting the two to fit. There are expectations for international visitors that we know people have to deal with. For example, the Spanish like to eat at 9 o'clock at night. Do we have places that are open? Visitors from the Gulf are concerned that they will not find halal food. We must make sure that that is understood by the trade. We can then replay internationally the message that that is working.

Q265 Geraint Davies: Is there a strategic opportunity for Cardiff airport in helping to sell Wales—getting people through that portal?

Patricia Yates: It is undoubtedly the case that direct links really help tourism. Wales is only two hours from Heathrow, so there is already good access to Wales—it is easy to get to; but, undoubtedly, building direct routes to Cardiff airport would help international tourism.

Q266 Geraint Davies: Finally, on the issue of VAT, do you feel that the 20% VAT rate is a big drag on tourism? Should the VAT rate be reduced for tourism?

Patricia Yates: Tourism is Britain's fifth biggest export industry, worth £24 billion. We are competing hugely with other countries who also see the potential of

international tourism to grow. Our forecast is that it will grow by 6% a year. It already gives £6 billion to the Exchequer. Obviously I come from a Government-funded body, so I would not comment on taxation issues.

Q267 Geraint Davies: But have you done the calculations? It sounds as if you might have. Have you presented the idea that if we cut the VAT rate on tourism to 10%, or whatever is allowed in the EU, that would be recovered by the extra tax provided by revenue growth?

Patricia Yates: Some really good modelling has been done by the industry. We have left it to the industry bodies, which are on top of this issue.

Geraint Davies: Does that show that if you cut the tax you get it back from more growth?

Patricia Yates: It shows the modelling.

Geraint Davies: Does it show what I said—that you would get the money back—or not?

Patricia Yates: There are different—

David Bishop: Their analysis looks at the net impact on the Exchequer. They believe it shows that there is a net benefit. HM Treasury is looking very closely at that analysis. That is as far as we can go.

Chair: Thank you for that. We will not catch you out on that one.

Q268 Guto Bebb: Going back to your previous answer—not in relation to VAT, but in relation to the fall-off in tourism from Ireland—is there any reason for that fall-off? Dare I say it, but does it have any relationship with the Irish decision to cut their VAT rate on tourism? I am just wondering, because it is a significant fall.

David Bishop: Very obviously, the reason that the Irish tourism market for Wales has fallen back so strongly is purely that the Irish economy took an absolutely huge nose-dive in 2008 as a result of the implosion of its banks and a massive housing bubble. If you look at the underlying performance of the Irish economy, yes, they are beginning to get the debt dynamics under control; however, economic growth has not returned, household income has not increased greatly and propensity to spend has not increased. That is a big structural change in the Irish economy.

They would argue that they made their change in VAT to improve the competitiveness of their domestic tourism industry. They did that in combination with changes to their visa regime, such as having a waiver for those who have a UK visa, and a couple of weeks ago the Home Secretary announced that we are now going to reciprocate. They also reduced air passenger duty for Ireland. Certainly, they feel that those supply-side reforms are benefiting their tourism industry, but it is clearly not doing it quite enough to fix the Irish economy sufficiently that Wales is now beginning to benefit.

Q269 Guto Bebb: No, but basically you are saying that the supply-side changes made by the Irish Government have made a difference to the tourism sector, if not sufficient for the

tourism sector to carry the whole Irish economy. In your view, have those supply-side changes had a positive impact from a tourism point of view?

David Bishop: Yes, absolutely. We produced some research back in May 2013, when we published a strategy for international tourism to the UK to 2020. That includes some modelling that looks very closely at a range of options, from policy changes through to the amount of money that the UK Government spend on promoting Britain for tourism overseas. It indicates very clearly that supply-side policy impacts have beneficial effects on the tourism industry. That is incontrovertible.

Q270 Guto Bebb: You have already touched on the extent to which Wales is known in the wider world. You could argue that the Irish have a very strong brand in comparison with the strength of the Welsh brand. Is there anything that the Welsh Government could do, for example, to try to increase the visibility and clarity of the messaging around what Wales is all about?

Patricia Yates: As I said before, our strength is that we understand international markets; we know which people are likely to travel and what they are interested in. The trick is making the Welsh message relevant to those customers. When people talk about brand, I do not think it is a one-off statement of a brand; it is thinking about who you are trying to attract and what would draw them in. Wales has considerable assets that work for it internationally; we know that Welsh castles do, for example. It is a more granular piece of work, about whom we want to get, what Wales has to offer and making sure that that is clearly articulated.

Q271 Guto Bebb: In the past your research has shown that Wales is probably the least recognised region of the UK. Has that led to any changes within your own organisation, for example, in the way you try to ensure that those messages are delivered to the target audience?

Patricia Yates: Yes. We have just got our PR results for last year. We delivered £104 million-worth of PR and international media for Wales. That was 12% of all we delivered internationally, so we are delivering disproportionately for Wales in that PR message.

In newer markets the travel trade is really important. My colleague has already talked about our big event next year, when we have Russians visiting, and we have more international groups visiting from that. It is about getting the travel trade into Wales to show them the experience and the people. Where the Irish have been really clever is in making it about not just the environment and the built landscape but the people and the experience. It is getting that message over internationally as well—getting the travel trade in so that they understand, and getting the PR people and journalists in so that they understand.

We also need to look at how we integrate Wales in our campaigns. For example, there are Wales images in “Sounds of GREAT Britain,” the big viral campaign we have going at the moment. We do a lot on social media. There is a lot of Welsh content on the LoveWall, as we call it, which is very photographic and inspirational. It is about seeding Welsh content through; when we place content on third-party sites such as

Yahoo! and Expedia, it is making sure that we get inspirational Welsh content in there. We are doing a great deal to increase that.

Recently we have done a lot of research into both long-haul and short-haul markets, looking at what drives people to travel and what are the barriers to travel. We will be working through that. Public transport is one of the issues we really need to pick up on. We need to get across a more integrated message about the ease with which you can travel around Britain. Many of our long-haul destinations do not have a public transport network like we do, even though we moan about it.

Q272 Guto Bebb: I have a final short question about the £104 million-worth of added value you offer, which was about 12%. Have those figures been made available to the Committee?

Patricia Yates: We have just had them. I can certainly send them as an update.

Guto Bebb: That would be very useful. Thank you.

Q273 Nia Griffith: Can I move on to the issue of targets? I understand that you have a target to attract 40 million visitors to the UK per year by 2020. Witnesses have commented to us that you are prioritising better-known parts of the UK. Is that true? Have you considered specific targets for specific parts of the UK?

Patricia Yates: No, I do not think that is true. In fact, it is absolutely the reverse of what we are doing. London held the Olympics in 2012, which was a big event. We had a huge strategy, and were tasked by Government to deliver a tourism uplift post-Olympics, with very stretching targets and a budget cut at the same time. We regard as part of the success of that the fact that 74% of people who saw Olympic coverage said that they wanted to explore other parts of Britain. We have put a huge effort into making sure that all of Britain is represented in what we promote overseas. We do not want people just to come to London, do a one-off visit and think that they have seen the UK; there is much more to Britain than that. Some of the values that the Britain brand is weak on internationally are things like countryside. We need to get people out to explore it.

Q274 Nia Griffith: Can I follow up on that? Let us park countryside and beaches, because if you come from a warm country you are not going to be interested in the beaches in Wales. What packages do you have for London-Cardiff-Swansea or London-Chester-north Wales, focusing on things like museums and art galleries—the city type of thing for people who are coming long haul, do not want to drive and need to rely on public transport and centres where there will be lots to do? How many of those packages are you promoting and selling? I have not heard a mention of those today.

Patricia Yates: Don't forget that we do not sell packages. We work with the travel trade so that they put together packages. We have a new travel trade website that has itineraries on it. We have what is called a BritAgent scheme, which trains international sellers on the range of what there is in Britain. There is a specific module for Wales, so they can be educated on that. We have round tables on markets, for example. A week ago we had a round table on Australia. The Australians are really interested in exploring the whole of Britain. The travel trade that came to that

absolutely wants to continue to take people through Wales. It is a strong market for Wales.

David Bishop: Can I quickly add a couple of things? Between April and September this year we are bringing 36 international press visits to Wales. Twenty-one of those will include time in Cardiff. We have a long-standing partnership with the FA Premier League. That means that in the past we worked with both Cardiff and Swansea; we are now working with Swansea—but there we are. We are very conscious of the fact that Wales is not purely mountains, castles, lakes and beaches; it is also cities and a vibrant city-break offer. That is part of what we promote. We work very actively with the travel trade overseas to help them to understand the entirety—the full range of experiences that Wales has to offer—so that they can package it up and sell it.

Patricia Yates: Can I say a bit about countryside? Our city offer is really important, but if you are sitting in a city in China the experience you are looking for is not just history and culture; it is about a relaxing environment. That is something that people need every year, whereas if you just have an offer that is about going to see major sites, you only need to see those major sites once. Getting the experience of a trip to Britain is an absolutely crucial part of what we need to do.

Q275 Nia Griffith: I am just worried that we often look at what might be called the easy targets—the northern Europeans and Australians, who are the types who are likely to go out and about, who are confident about driving and are confident with the language. What we really need to look at are the newer markets, where there is not that sort of confidence or facility with getting around the UK. We need to look at marketing to them in a way that is more acceptable for them.

Patricia Yates: China is absolutely one of our growth markets, so let me take that as an example. We have launched a China Welcome programme to make Britain the most welcoming destination in Europe. We invited businesses to sign up for that, as Welsh businesses such as Celtic Manor have done, so that we can share best practice and promote businesses that we know have the criteria to appeal to Chinese visitors internationally, and we can promote the fact that Britain is a welcoming destination. We have put a lot of effort into the new growth markets. There is always a balance between where you get value now—the people you want to come this year and next year, which is the travel trade's immediate desire—and how you build for the growth markets of the future. You will see that in the way we allocate our funding, and in the GREAT funding; we absolutely look at the balance.

Q276 Chair: I have a quick question for you. Do you have some figures for the number of people coming here on what you might call standard two-week package holidays from developing countries like India or China? I would find it interesting to know, in terms of numbers, just how many people in countries we traditionally think of as poor—I know that is an outdated term—are able to afford to come over and have a two-week package holiday in the UK.

David Bishop: We will have to go away and look at the data we have. That is certainly something we have at a number of points in the past. I am not entirely sure how up to date it is, but I am very happy to go away and to come back on that.

Chair: It would be an interesting indicator of places we might want to look to. If you have something in that format, we would all find it quite interesting.

Q277 Geraint Davies: On the numbers, the Welsh Government say that VisitBritain's activities generate only 4% of the total value of inbound tourism in Wales. Wales is about 5% or 6% of Britain, so you would think that, pro rata, we would get 5% or 6% of that, but the Welsh Government say that we are getting only 4% of that 5% from your activities. How do you respond to that? It sounds like a minuscule amount.

David Bishop: It is not 2.4% of 5%. They are incorrect, if that is what they are arguing.

Geraint Davies: No, it is 4% of the total value of inbound tourism. I was saying 4% of 5%; I do not know where the 2.5% came in.

David Bishop: To unpack this slightly, if there were no tourist boards there would still be international travel; that is the fact of the matter. We are targeted and funded by DCMS to deliver what is called incremental visits and incremental spend. There are a certain number of international visitors who would come to the UK each year. Our job is to get a little bit extra on top—think of it as being like the icing on the cake. Over four years, from 2010 to 2014, we have been asked to get 4 million additional visitors—call it 1 million a year, for argument's sake. Our evaluation shows that last year we were directly responsible, through our marketing, for 2.4% of all international visitors who came to the UK; they chose to do so because of what we did. That is the reality of being funded and targeted to deliver incremental value.

For the UK as a whole, we delivered 2.4%. For Wales, we delivered 4% of all international visitors. Far from saying that we are a minuscule part of what is going on, if you look at what we deliver for Wales versus what we deliver for the UK as a whole in terms of international visitors, we are actually doing much better in getting people to go to Wales. It is a misreading of the evidence to suggest that we are not doing that.

You can have an argument about whether incremental value and incremental visits are really the right measure of success for a tourist board. That is a discussion we are looking at very closely in terms of various reviews that are under way, and where we pitch our tent come the spending round next year. However, the fact of the matter is that as things currently stand we are doing better for Wales than we are doing for the UK as a whole.

Q278 Geraint Davies: Can I ask you two quick questions? First, can you evaluate what the 4% is—how many people? Secondly, you are promoting Wales in 22 overseas markets, aren't you? In which markets are you specifically pushing Wales ahead of other UK regions? Are there any places where you are putting Wales at the top of the pile in terms of targeting? What is the 4% figure? How many is that? Is it 10,000 people or 10 people?

David Bishop: I will calculate it while my colleague talks about the markets.

Patricia Yates: As you know, Visit Wales's priority markets are Germany, the US and Ireland. As I said, we do not operate in Ireland; we have stood back and left that to Visit Wales to do.

Geraint Davies: Because it's collapsed.

Patricia Yates: We are doing a piece of work that looks at which are the best customer segments and what will appeal to them and then matches them with destinations that would work in those countries. That is currently ongoing. At the moment we promote Wales equally internationally. Visit Wales has a particular focus in those markets. We are looking to make that offer clearer and more pertinent to the international customer. That is a piece of refining that we are currently doing.

Q279 Geraint Davies: But in the case of Germany, you would not put Wales first. It would be Britain first, wouldn't it, and then Wales as a subset of that?

Patricia Yates: No. The understanding of Germans is quite differentiated. We have considerable attractions for them in the west country, in Wales and in Scotland. It is about what sort of thing they like and what they have to be talked to about.

Q280 Geraint Davies: I would have thought that an international visitor would know about Britain first, and then about Wales very much at the back of the room. That is not a criticism of Wales—it is just natural. People will normally want to come to London in the first instance; they even think about Europe and arriving in Britain. Is VisitBritain an essential front door for Visit Wales? Is there a problem with Visit Wales going off and trying to do their own thing and carrying too much heavy weight, when what they really should be doing is jumping on the back of VisitBritain? You would get the people through the door and we would grab them, as opposed to our trying to reinvent the wheel.

Patricia Yates: We see life in competitive markets. I would not say there is any market in which all the Britain agencies together are outspending their competitors, so it makes absolute sense, with the limited funds that we all have available, for us to work closely together.

Geraint Davies: Is there that intimate co-operation?

Chair: I want to butt in myself with a question on this. To pick up on what Geraint was saying—

Geraint Davies: I will leave it there, but do you want to finish off your sentence?

David Bishop: Yes; 40% of the 884,000 international visitors to Wales is 354,000 people.¹ When you think back to the context of our getting 1 million extra visitors a year, that is about a third, rather than a quarter.

Geraint Davies: That is good.

¹ VisitBritain wish to correct this. The correct figure is 36,000 international visitors, which is equivalent to 3.6% of all the visitors VisitBritain directly attracts to the UK.

Q281 Chair: My colleague has run a tourism business—

Geraint Davies: Yes, I have run travel companies.

Chair: He is on to something quite interesting, and it is this. From the point of view of English taxpayers, you are being funded by DCMS, yet you are VisitBritain. We have a separate Visit Wales in Wales, which is presumably encouraging people to come only to Wales and not to England. In some ways, you are being quite generous in trying to get people into Wales, aren't you, when we have our own body that is trying to get people into Wales as well and you are being paid for by the English taxpayer?

David Bishop: We are being funded by the British taxpayer, to be fair. Given that international visitors to the UK pay £6 billion in taxes to come here and while they are here, and our budget is £20 million, you could probably make quite a good argument that we are actually being funded by the international visitors themselves—and then some.

Q282 Chair: By the sounds of your evidence, you are doing a pretty good job of getting people into Wales.

Patricia Yates: Yes, we would say so.

Q283 Chair: So what is Visit Wales doing?

Patricia Yates: We already work closely with Visit Wales. They have three staff in our American office. We are looking at getting an implant into the London office. What does Visit Wales do? Our staff are in international markets. They understand the demand side. Visit Wales does domestic tourism, which we do not do at all.

Q284 Chair: Do you mean from within the UK?

Patricia Yates: Yes. It is also the custodian of the product. What we need is good, quality product and the packaging of product that makes it easier for the international visitor to access it and for the international travel trade to package and sell it. When we are promoting Britain, including Wales, on third-party websites, through social media, to international media, that rich content will then come through to us in a way that we can use.

Q285 Chair: It is unfortunate that I am putting this to you because they were not able to come and see us, for some reason I am trying to get to the bottom of— involving the Minister, I believe. You have just said to me that their role is to encourage domestic tourism—

Patricia Yates: I said that they do that uniquely, in that we do not do domestic at all. They also have an international role.

Q286 Chair: But you also mentioned that they have three people in the American office. Presumably they have people dotted around the world.

Patricia Yates: Not to my knowledge. They have three with us in America and one person who is coming to be with us in Germany.

Q287 Chair: As they cannot come in to answer questions, I suppose I will have to leave that one there. What about Poland and Japan? For some reason I cannot quite figure out, but that I am very pleased to hear, apparently Welsh is being taught at universities in Poland and Japan. Is that something you have been made aware of? Is there some mechanism by which we might encourage Welsh-speaking Japanese and Polish students to visit Wales?

Patricia Yates: On the international student market—given that we are following on from the British Council—I think that it is a really clever thing to do to get people here to study and form a lifelong love of the country, as well as to have their relatives come and visit, because you get money not just immediately but over a lifetime. That is a huge advantage. I am smiling because the Japanese market is a difficult one at the moment, but we should use that connection and get people who are ambassadors, particularly on social media, where it is very easy for people to talk about somewhere they love and connect with an authentic culture.

Q288 Geraint Davies: Is there a specific focus on converting foreign students at, say, Swansea, into ambassadors for the place, to get more tourism networking, but also things like inward investment? Is that part of your focus or not?

Patricia Yates: The whole premise of the GREAT campaign is to have the bodies that promote Britain overseas—the British Council, UKTI, ourselves and the Foreign Office—do that.

Geraint Davies: Through universities.

Patricia Yates: It is about Britain as a place to study, a place to invest and a place to visit. That layer of activity is going through there.

Q289 Nia Griffith: Would you like to comment further on the memorandum of understanding that I understand you have had with Visit Wales since January? What role do you think the person seconded to you would best carry out? It seems to me that there is still a lot of work to be done to make the most effective use of partnership working.

Patricia Yates: We have a number of formal arrangements with Visit Wales. We have someone from Visit Wales on our board already. We do not have the opportunity to present to the Visit Wales board, which I think we would welcome. Our CEOs meet regularly, and we have functional meetings for research and PR. That all goes very well. The MOU comes on top of that, as the formalising of a relationship that is already very active and engaged. The idea of having a member of Wales staff in our office is that it is just easier to be part of the conversation if you are where the conversation is taking place. When we are discussing marketing, trade engagement or our missions, having someone there who can link instantly into Visit Wales will be a real help for Wales, in terms of seeing what the international opportunities are and how we can pool Welsh product. We also have a very good relationship with the Wales Tourism Alliance, which is a very active member of our consultative body.

Q290 Chair: How often do you meet the Tourism Minister in the Welsh Assembly?

Patricia Yates: To my knowledge, we have never met the Tourism Minister. I gave evidence to the Welsh Assembly a couple of weeks ago.

Q291 Chair: To a Select Committee?

Patricia Yates: Yes. Our chairman and board have been to visit Wales recently, a couple of weeks ago.

Q292 Chair: Does the Minister responsible for tourism meet somebody in VisitBritain on a regular basis?

Patricia Yates: Not to my knowledge.²

Q293 Guto Bebb: You mentioned the Wales Tourism Alliance as a body that works with you. They gave evidence to the Committee highlighting the fact that they think that the GREAT brand has worked in bringing people to the UK but not necessarily in bringing people to Wales. If Visit Wales is supposed to attract people domestically, whose responsibility is it to try to make sure that tourists brought into the UK are shared around?

David Bishop: Visit Wales has a domestic and an international role. VisitBritain has a purely international role. As you can imagine, given that substantial amounts of public money are involved, we evaluate the effectiveness of spending on the GREAT campaign very rigorously. “Recallers” is a fantastic marketing term for “Do you remember an advert?” Those who recall the campaign are twice as likely to travel to Wales as those who do not, or have not seen the campaign at all. People who have been influenced by the campaign and go to Wales will spend three times as many nights in Wales as those who have not. In terms of holiday visits from markets where we are using the GREAT campaign—Brazil, China, France, Germany, India and the United States—Wales has seen the fastest percentage growth of any constituent part of the UK. It is absolutely the case that the GREAT campaign for tourism is delivering for Wales.

Q294 Guto Bebb: Are those stats available to the Committee?

David Bishop: Absolutely.

Q295 Guto Bebb: Basically, that contradicts the Welsh Government’s research that the GREAT campaign “does not offer a strong platform” for tourism in Wales.

Patricia Yates: Yes.

Guto Bebb: I am happy with that.

Q296 Simon Hart: Are trade fairs good or bad? Do they work? Is Wales adequately represented?

² VisitBritain wish to correct this. VisitBritain’s Chief Executive, Sandie Dawe met with Edwina Hart, once, in 2012 when she was escorting a group of international travel trade members on a familiarisation trip to Wales.

Patricia Yates: Trade fairs do work, particularly in newer markets where legislation may be complex, and personal contact is all. We run trade fairs. I would say that our most successful are the ones in Russia, China and Brazil. We have just done a big one in Malaysia, which pulls together the middle east and south-east Asia; we also do a big one in America.

UKTI give some funding for new people who have not been to trade fairs at all, so this is an area where SMEs can get funding. Again, we evaluate the work that comes from that. People tell us that they get good business, but it all depends on our getting the right travel trade people to come and meet. And yes, Wales does come on them. They are a really good first step. It would be good if they were more joined up. I talk about the package, but what we tend to get is individual attractions and sites coming on those missions. We need to get a more integrated approach, so that an international travel trade person can package it more easily. We also have seminars on nations and regions of the UK. We have a seminar on Wales, so the international travel trade can engage with and learn about that. They are really valuable, and I would encourage Welsh suppliers to come on them. The popular ones sell out very quickly.

Q297 Simon Hart: I have one last question. Our colleagues in the Welsh Government in Cardiff say that Wales is “poorly represented” on the VisitBritain website. Is that a fair accusation, or are they talking nonsense?

Patricia Yates: If you look at digital and social media, our digital strategy is currently to get content on to third-party sites, because only 9% of potential international visitors come to DMO websites. Most international visitors look at 22 sites, so the important thing is to get your content in a place where they are looking, such as the Yahoo! and Expedia sites. We do some very clever disrupting marketing. If you google Paris, a British city will pop up and we will say, “Have you considered going to Cardiff?” It works. Very often on those sites people are looking for price and availability, so that sort of thing works. We get content from Wales and we feed that through internationally. That is where the bulk of our effort currently goes.

Our website is ripe for redevelopment. We are looking at a digital strategy at the moment and we are in discussions with Visit Wales about Welsh content and what that will look like. What we have done on the current website is to have much more focused content and links down to destinations and attractions; the breadth and depth is not absolutely visible on the website at the first look, but it is all up for negotiation. We are looking to see what the next phase is.

Chair: I am going to rush everyone, if I may. Geraint, do you want to ask a very quick question?

Q298 Geraint Davies: I meant to ask how much work you do with individual tour operators abroad to get people to package up Britain and to come to Wales.

Patricia Yates: That is absolutely a focus. Two key parts of our Britain strategy and the target to get 40 million visitors were making sure that Britain is sold—engagement with the travel trade and making sure we get people to missions and bring

people over to show them what there is in Britain—and making sure that we have the product, packageable and commissionable, to work for international buyers.

Geraint Davies: For Wales as well?

Patricia Yates: Yes.

Q299 Jessica Morden: Earlier in the inquiry we had some evidence from people saying that the Ryder cup did not benefit Wales as much as it should have. Were you involved in the promotion of Wales through that? Do you agree? If it is true, whose fault do you think that is?

Patricia Yates: We had some involvement; we would be in a supportive role. With the big set-piece events like the Olympics, it is about showcasing the destination at the time. The tourism follow-through—the hard work—comes afterwards. It was unfortunate that it rained—so God's fault, obviously—but making sure that you get good images of the content that you want to show internationally and making sure that visiting journalists are blogging and being entertained well, so that they see the range of the Welsh product, is absolutely part of the mix that we would pass on as our experience.

Q300 Jessica Morden: With that in mind—NATO summit question alert—

Patricia Yates: I thought you might come to that next.

Jessica Morden: What lessons can we learn for the NATO summit, given that it is fast approaching? What is your role? Who is doing what?

Patricia Yates: Our role is very much supportive. This is a Wales event. We have introduced Wales to the GREAT team and some images have been agreed under the GREAT branding that will be used at the event itself. We have a really good PR team, which is working with them on the images that you will see on television screens and how that works in international markets, to make sure that Wales makes the best of that opportunity. There is particular interest in Obama coming and, if he brings Michelle, making sure that she has an interesting programme, because they are very active in social media.

Jessica Morden: We are all very interested in that programme.

Patricia Yates: There are some very practical things that can be done.

Q301 Jessica Morden: Newport also wants to be promoted through having the NATO summit; we want to improve the recognition of Newport as well as of Wales. When you are promoting Wales to international visitors, how can we use that opportunity to promote Newport as well? It is probably nothing to do with you, but I have just looked on the Government website that leads you to information about the NATO summit. There is an introduction to Wales, with Beaumaris castle, Caernarfon castle, Laugharne and Rhossili, all of which are beautiful and significant to Wales, but a bit more reference to Newport and the surrounding area would not go amiss. How do you think we can do that? Last week there was

controversy over the logo, because it was felt that there was not enough reference to Newport in it. How do we do all those things?

Patricia Yates: You have the huge opportunity of actually having the media there. They will be in Newport. All the tourism businesses need to pull together and make sure that those media are really well looked after and have a great time. Internationally, not everyone gets that right. The media are a really important constituent in your tourism delivery for the future. If Wales is not well known, Newport is probably even less well known. Use the strong attractions and experiences that you have, so people go away thinking, “It is a really welcoming place. Michelle had a great time going round and has tweeted about it all.” It is using those opportunities.

Q302 Jessica Morden: Is it part of your role to go to journalists who are going to be around in the weeks preceding the summit, to help to look after them and to organise what they see?

Patricia Yates: We are having discussions with Visit Wales about what they would like us to do.

Chair: Thank you very much for that. As a Newport boy, now living in Monmouthshire, I really hope we are going to use this opportunity to raise the profile of both those wonderful places—the town and the county. Both of them need and deserve it. It is a golden opportunity I hope we will take advantage of. Thank you very much for coming in.