

Mr Huw Irranca-Davies AM
Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Mr Alun Evans
British Academy
10-11 Carlton House Terrace
London
SW1Y 5AH

25 July 2017

Dear Mr Irranca-Davies,

Re: Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee: A stronger voice for Wales inquiry

Following your letter of 25 May 2017, please find below points addressing the questions, and others, raised in your letter to us. Please accept our apologies for this late response.

The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. Founded by Royal Charter in 1902, we are a Fellowship of the country's leading academic scholars. We exist to champion the health of our disciplines, and distribute funding to researchers at all career levels, while drawing upon the expertise of our Fellows to address some of the leading public policy challenges of the day.

While some of the points we make below are wider in scope than the three questions you posed to us, we hope they are useful in setting the wider context in which we work in Wales, and the rest of the UK.

As you may know, the British Academy works very closely with the Learned Society for Wales, and the other national academies, as well as the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. In our work we often draw upon the expertise and support of Fellows to respond to consultations and develop policy programmes. We have a small number of Fellows in Wales; the majority of these Fellows are also Fellows of the Learned Society for Wales, and we generally work in collaboration with them in Wales or they may take the lead in responding to consultations etc where more appropriate. We enjoy a close working relationship with the LSW, and our Chief Executive and Secretary recently travelled to Cardiff to meet with senior colleagues there, alongside our Head of Public Policy.

Are there any barriers to engagement with the National Assembly?

We have found no particular barriers to engaging with the National Assembly, but resource constraints mean we may only respond to relevant consultations if proactively contacted, but otherwise we usually only undertake reactive work with the Assembly owing to only having a small engagement team at the British Academy. We do have a desire to work with the Assembly, but hope you recognise as a publicly funded institution we have limited resources, so it is easier for us to coordinate on a cross-Academy basis, and through the Learned Society for Wales, as usual practice.

We do, however, hold events in Wales as part of our policy projects as and when necessary. For example, as part of our public policy project 'Where We Live Now', we held a roundtable meeting in Cardiff on 29 July 2016, with support from the LSW. This meeting focussed on health inequalities and public policy in south Wales, and was well attended by civil servants, health professionals, statisticians, academics and others, including the Wales Policy Institute.

What is your perception of the process for engaging with committees in Cardiff compared to London, Edinburgh or Belfast?

We do not perceive there to be material differences between the consultation processes across the four assemblies and parliaments. We have not found the process of engagement challenging; for the British Academy, we must prioritise what we choose to engage on, based on the expertise and capacity of our Fellows, and our constraints as staff working across a broad remit.

What is your perception and expectation of inter-institutional working and relationships, and your thoughts on learning from other institutions?

Our projects are UK wide and draw on evidence from all corners of the country. For example, our project 'Local Actions on Social Integration' received a lot of responses in its call for evidence from Wales, and one of the essays in our planned publication focuses on ESOL teacher training and working with migrants in South Wales. Last year we published a range of booklets on human rights, and these included 'Human Rights from the Perspective of Devolution in Wales' by Thomas Glyn Watkin. The British academy has previously held two joint conferences on Welsh devolution with the Learned Society of Wales, publishing reports as a result. We are always keen to learn from other institutions, and have not generally experienced anything negative from doing so. We expect our relationships to be mutually beneficial where possible, with the Academy lending expertise and resource to similar organisations where possible, and vice versa.

We also work with the other 3 UK-wide national academies - The Royal Society, the Royal Academy of Engineering, and the Academy of Medical Sciences - on events in the National Assembly on a regular basis; our materials are taken to events there where the national academies have a stall at exhibitions and science fairs, and we work collectively as a four to promote our joint calls and messages, and joint documents such as the Technopolis report and Open for Business.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond FBA FRSE FAcSS, a leading Fellow and chair of the British Academy Skills project, recently led a review of Higher Education in Wales, so at all levels our Fellows are engaging in Wales and assisting with the development of public policy. We would be delighted to talk with you in more depth at a future date if convenient.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alun Evans', with a horizontal line underneath.

Alun Evans
Chief Executive and Secretary