

## Ireland

21-23 February 2024

As set out in the application for international travel, this visit provided an important opportunity to build and develop links with both individuals and institutions in Ireland –in higher education, business and civil society. Including in light of Brexit, building and consolidating such links is a key strategic priority for the Plaid Cymru Senedd Group, the Senedd and Wales more widely – as expressed for example in the [Ireland-Wales shared statement and joint action plan 2021 to 2025](#) and [The Irish Sea Framework](#).

Immediately following an early morning sailing from Caergybi on 21 February, the first stop on the visit was Leinster House, Dublin, where we met with Mary Lou McDonald TD, Leader of the Opposition. We discussed recent political and constitutional developments on both sides of the Irish Sea, including forthcoming referendums – on [family and care](#) – and local and European elections in Ireland and the forthcoming Westminster election, exploring shared opportunities and challenges on both sides of the Irish Sea. Critically, the meeting represented an opportunity to present and discuss the work of the [Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales](#), the findings of its final report, and the model it represents for exploring contested constitutional questions in a collaborative, cross-party forum which prioritises citizen engagement. Following the meeting, we were able to share further information about the Commission, and have engaged in ongoing dialogue about whether and in what ways it may be emulated on the island of Ireland as citizens North and South continue to debate their own constitutional future.

The meeting with Mary Lou McDonald was followed by an interview with Irish Times journalist Ronan McGreevy, for [an article](#) that appeared in the Irish Times as part of its *Common Ground* series exploring British-Irish relations and political futures after Brexit.

On the morning of 22 February, ahead of the public lecture at University College Cork (UCC), we attended [two stakeholder meetings](#) with Simply Blue Group and Cork Chamber of Commerce, to discuss research, trade and commercial links across the Irish Sea. We examined the capacity for greater Ireland-Wales collaboration across the Irish Sea space in renewable energy development, with a focus on hydrogen, and where and how business links might be better developed. These meetings provided an insight into the range of opportunities that have been lost to Wales as a consequence of Brexit, but where collaboration with Irish partners might open doors to re-establishing connections with European research, innovation and business networks more widely. Crucially, it became clear that we in Wales should continue and intensify efforts to develop cross-Irish Sea networks, and commit a commensurate level of funding to these efforts.

The afternoon of 22 February was given over to final preparations for and delivery of the Jean Monnet [public lecture at UCC](#), *Wales' Constitutional Future: The European Dimension*, which was chaired and introduced by Dr Mary C. Murphy, Head of the Department of Government and Politics. The lecture, and the Q and A which followed, provided an opportunity to explore key issues in contemporary Welsh politics with an Irish audience, including students, academics and local politicians. Following the election, there was also an opportunity to discuss, in particular, gender quotas (in the context of a wider discussion on Senedd reform) with subject matter expert, Dr Fiona Buckley.

The lecture was followed by a dinner, attended by Mary and Paul Gillespie – former Irish Times journalist, director of the Constitutional Futures after Brexit project at University College Dublin, and a member of the UK Group at the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA). This was another opportunity to discuss, in particular, the work of the Constitutional Commission, and further information was provided in a follow-up email, to feed in to a number of ongoing academic projects exploring Ireland’s constitutional future.

The visit concluded with a final informal catch-up and debrief with Mary on the morning of 23 February.