# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Visit to the US South** |
| **DATE**  | **11 September** |
| **BY** | **Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education**  |

This is to update Members on my recent visit to Texas, Alabama and Georgia, to promote Wales as a study destination, build civic and education partnerships, and secure agreements and opportunities for Welsh students, academics and organisations.

The visit included meetings with Presidents and senior representatives from leading US universities, the Mayor of Birmingham, Alabama, HM Consuls General in Houston and Atlanta and UK trade and science officials, speaking engagements at universities and business events, and hosting receptions to promote Wales and our higher education sector, alongside colleagues from Welsh universities.

During my time in Houston, Texas, with the Vice Chancellor of Swansea University, we visited the Baylor College of Medicine, the Houston Methodist Research Institute and the University of Houston.‌ There are clear opportunities to build on these research links and I was pleased that the Vice Chancellor was able to sign an MoU with the University of Houston.

I delivered a lecture at the University of Houston and met with US-Wales exchange students, where we discussed the Welsh Government’s investment in outward mobility opportunities and attracting more US students to Wales, and our new partnerships with the Fulbright Commission and the Benjamin A Gilman International Scholarship programme.

Working with Welsh Government North America colleagues, I hosted a reception at HM Consul General’s residence in Houston. It was extremely well attended with representatives from colleges and universities, Welsh-Texas civil society, industry leaders and many others. I had the honour of meeting George Abbey, the Welsh-American former Director of the Johnson Space Center and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

In Birmingham, Alabama I met with Mayor Randall Woodfin and his officials. There was much interest in our apprenticeships policy, lifelong learning commitments and curriculum reform. Welsh Government officials are already taking this forward and I am confident of further developing a strong and special partnership with Birmingham based on these areas of common interest.

Alongside the Chief Executive of Urdd Gobaith Cymru, I had the privilege of paying my respects at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham and viewing the Wales Window. I delivered a letter and gift on behalf of the First Minister, and working with the Urdd we discussed practical ways to deepen the friendship between the Church, Alabama and Wales.

I had a positive visit to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where Aberystwyth University agreed an MoU and Cardiff University is also developing a partnership.

In Atlanta, I was the guest speaker at a World Affairs Council event, hosted by the President of Georgia State University. It was an important opportunity to promote Wales’s education reform journey and successes to an audience of Georgia State Assembly members, education leaders and representatives from industry.

At the HM Consul General’s residence in Atlanta, I hosted a reception to celebrate the centenary of Aberystwyth University’s International Politics department and met existing and potential new partners for Aberystwyth and other Welsh universities. I also visited and met with representatives of Georgia Tech University.

Finally, the Welsh Government signed a Statement of Intent with Emory University (incorporating the Atlanta Studies Network) to promote ongoing mutual cooperation in educational and research activities to strengthen university and civic-cooperation. We will work with our partners in the university sector, the Learned Society of Wales and HEFCW to take this important international civic mission partnership forward.

Throughout the visit there was significant interest in what Wales and our universities can offer, and how we can work with civic and education institutions across the US south to deepen and strengthen student exchanges, study abroad programme and research relationships. There will be further developments in these areas in the coming months.

Our international education engagement continues this week as Cardiff hosts the fourth Atlantic Rim Collabatory Summit, following on from California last year.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Assembly returns I would be happy to do so.