

NAFSA 2015: Report to Funders

1. Introduction

This report details universities in Wales' activities at the NAFSA 2015 conference and exhibition, and makes recommendations for future activity for Welsh universities' NAFSA presence going forward.

2. Background

NAFSA: Association of International Educators is a non-profit organisation for professionals in all areas of international education. This includes education abroad advice and administration, international student advice, campus internationalisation, admissions, outreach, overseas advice, and English as a second language administration. NAFSA's mission is to advance international education and exchange and global workforce development.

Each year, the NAFSA event brings together between 9,000 and 14,000 educators, influencers, practitioners and industry professionals in the field of international education for five days of training, workshops, educational sessions, and networking opportunities. The event is a one stop shop for business between countries in higher education, research, and innovation from across the globe. It is the largest single event for international educators in the world.

In 2015, the NAFSA annual conference and exhibition took place in Boston, Massachusetts, from 25-29 May. Wales' universities attended the conference, hosting a booth in the exhibition hall and a Wales reception where the new Study in Wales brand was officially launched. The Welsh presence was funded by Universities Wales (Unis Wales), British Council Wales (BC Wales), the Welsh Government (WG) and five of the Welsh universities each paying for a table on the stand.

This report is being submitted to the Vice Chancellors of Wales' universities, WG officials, and BC Wales.

3. NAFSA Exhibition

The NAFSA international education exhibition 2015 acted as a gateway for Wales' universities to meet face to face with around 300 overseas partners as well as hundreds of new contacts.¹ These ranged from institutional leaders to programme representatives, service and technology providers, and educational suppliers. The exhibition allowed university colleagues to: connect face to face with colleagues from around the world; discuss local needs; establish partnerships with institutions, organisations and individuals; and network.

¹ See NAFSA Partners and Contacts table, page 6

NAFSA conference delegates this year came from more than 100 countries and exhibitors included Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, Peru, Poland, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, as well as the USA. 60% of participants were based in the USA. Of the non US participants, the make-up was:

- Europe 40%
- Asia / Pacific 34%
- Latin America 9%
- North America 16%
- Africa 1%

The event provided a forum for Wales to have a high-profile presence to showcase its offering. Universities in Wales worked together at the event primarily promoting Wales as a whole, with their respective university promotion underpinning the Wales-wide messages. Wales' universities remain keen to expand their presence in the worldwide market and build upon the extensive work undertaken in the last few years. This aspiration has been underpinned by a commitment in the WG's HE Statement:

*'Universities and the Welsh Government will work in partnership to develop international links that will help Wales become a partner of choice for international business and investment and destination of choice for international students and staff. Wales needs to strengthen and maximise the value of the international connections already forged by universities, using those connections to drive inward investment. Wales must project the consistent message overseas that we are open for business and that international students add to the richness and diversity of the student body and are, therefore, welcome and valued.'*²

It is also a key theme of the WG's tourism strategy '*Partnership for Growth*³' that states:

'... the new strategy will mean focusing upon five key areas – Promoting the Brand, Product Development, People Development, Profitable Performance and Place Building. Overseas, the three key markets identified by the panel are Ireland, Germany and USA.... Our key to delivering growth during these difficult times will be working in partnership to maximise resources and intelligence and working together to make Wales a stronger tourism destination.'

² [Welsh Government HE Statement](#)

³ [Welsh Government Tourism Strategy 'Partnership for Growth'](#)

4. Funding for Wales at NAFSA 2015

Universities in Wales had a budget of £52,500 for NAFSA 2015. This included 25,000 from participating universities as well as a grant of £15,000 from Welsh Government, £10,000 from Universities Wales, and £2,500 from British Council Wales. The breakdown of expenditure for Wales at NAFSA 2015 is included in Annex D.

Aberystwyth University (AU), Bangor University (BU), Cardiff University (CU), Swansea University (SU) and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) each invested £5,000 in the Study in Wales stand. The University of South Wales (USW) also attended the conference and Wales reception, but did not opt for a table on the booth.

5. Wales Activity at NAFSA 2015

Wales' presence at NAFSA comprised of two principal activities: the Study in Wales booth and the Wales reception. All the Welsh universities that attended provided comprehensive feedback on their attendance and participation at both events (detailed below). Universities met a range of new and existing partners and will be monitoring the impact of this activity moving forward as part of their wider international activities.

i) *The 'Study in Wales' Booth*

The booth is the most visual element of a country's presence at NAFSA and feedback from NAFSA 2014 was that Wales had to up its game in respect of the booth. Unis Wales used this feedback and ensured that the 2015 booth was visually impressive; two very large hanging banners with a striking image of the Welsh coast were visible from the entrance to the hall. The use of the new 'Study in Wales' logo and marketing materials provided brand continuity and a more professional look to the booth. The space (30'x 20') allowed for meeting space for the five universities who had contributed financially to the booth. University colleagues, their partners and passers-by all commented on the quality of the booth's finish and its striking appearance. The booth design is included in Annex B.

Catering was organised for a booth launch of 'Study in Wales' on 28 May to raise awareness of the brand (the main launch took place at the Wales reception on 26 May - see below). Universities Wales placed an advertisement in the hard copy of the Chronicle newspaper to coincide with NAFSA to drive traffic towards the booth. There were over 100 attendees at the booth launch, with most taking part in a competition to win Welsh themed prizes by entering their business cards into a draw (over 90 business cards were entered in total).

ii) *The Wales Reception (Main launch of Study in Wales)*

The Wales reception has become an annual event at NAFSA and is an opportunity for Welsh universities to meet with partners, maintain existing relationships, and to showcase the best of Wales. Given that the event has built a reputation for being welcoming and engaging, the decision was taken to organise a small scale event in terms of venue capacity and to invite all of the Welsh universities' key partners and contacts. This made for a busy

and vibrant atmosphere for the launch of Study in Wales and maintained partners' expectations in terms of the type of event staged.

The reception was well attended with the venue full to capacity (100 guests). The venue was decorated with Welsh flags and bunting and guests were served Welsh themed food and drinks, including Welsh cheeses provided by Welsh Government Trade and Invest in the US. The Vice Chancellor of Aberystwyth University, Professor April McMahon, gave a speech launching Study in Wales. The speech, which was very well received, was an opportunity to promote all of the Welsh universities and to highlight the key messages of the new Study in Wales brand.

iii) *Web and social media*

The launch of Study in Wales also involved launching the new www.studyinwales.ac.uk website and @StudyWales twitter feed. From 25 May to 1 June, @StudyWales tweets received over 37,000 views and over 1,200 twitter engagements. This boosted traffic to the website, which went from 0 (pre-launch) to over 250 visitors during the 5 day NAFSA period.

6. International Partners and Contacts

Overall, Welsh universities increased the number of collaborations made and meetings held during NAFSA 2015, demonstrating the value and consistent demand for a strong Welsh presence from Wales at the event.

The feedback detailed on the following pages has been provided by representatives of the institutions who attended:

- Aberystwyth University (AU);
- Bangor University (BU);
- Cardiff University (CU);
- Swansea University (SU);
- University of South Wales (USW)
- The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD)

The table below outlines the number of **existing partners** met, the number of **new partners** met and the number of **new contacts** made during NAFSA. It also shows the figures from 2013-2015 for comparison:

University	2013 Existing Partners	2014 Existing Partners	2015 Existing Partners	2013 New Partners	2014 New Partners	2015 New Partners	2013 New Contacts	2014 New Contacts	2015 New Contacts
AU	14	29	27	22	34	22	11	48	5
BU	26	29	35	25	22	21	112	68	58
CU	14	14	36	11	22	38	0	54	169
SU	45	44	40	4	5	8	0	54	8
USW	10	16	34	34	18	11	0	64	31
UWTSD	n/a	n/a	14	n/a	n/a	6	n/a	n/a	9
Total	109	132	186	96	101	106	123	288	280

Regional Spread

Taking existing and new partners together, Welsh universities met with partners from 22 countries worldwide whilst at NAFSA 2015. These were: the United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Ireland.

Unfortunately, not all universities have returned a breakdown detailing numbers per country at this point. However, Cardiff University's figures provide a helpful example: of their combined total of 74 partners met, 46% were North American, 21% Asian, 14% Latin American, 14% Australasian, 5% European.

7. Feedback on the Wales Booth and Reception

The Study in Wales presence – both booth and reception - received positive feedback from Welsh university representatives, their international partners and passers-by. Below are some examples of their feedback:

What a beautiful stand – I wish I'd studied in Wales!

Sevsen Bati, Head of International Relations, Bezmialem Vakif University, Turkey

The new Study in Wales booth is very striking with a friendly, open and inviting atmosphere. Congratulations, a great new booth for 2015.

Evan Mills, University of Vermont

Great design and loads of space. It was so much better than in previous years and looked very professional. We had lots of positive comments from partners.

Rose Matthews, Cardiff University

Feedback from my partners (about the reception) was excellent.

Dr Robert Morgan, University of South Wales

University representatives were also asked for feedback as to how the Welsh presence could be improved in future years. Below are some of the ideas they expressed:

The booth is a great space for meeting existing partners and a great showcase for "Brand Wales" However, there wasn't much of an opportunity for individual institutional branding and we would encourage more of this next year.

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

The 2015 booth made a dramatic impact at NAFSA, delegates were stopping to take pictures of the scenic banners. The investment in quality furnishings provided a professional and academic environment in which to hold meetings with existing/new partners. Again, location could have been better, but given the design of the booth, it did actually work well for us this year.

Angela Jones, Swansea University

8. Benefits of Wales' Presence at NAFSA

As NAFSA is a worldwide conference it is a cost effective way of raising Wales' profile on the international stage and meeting colleagues from around the globe in one location. Colleagues from the participating Welsh universities all cite this as being the primary benefit for them of taking part.

It is widely recognised by universities, business and government that an international mobility placement can greatly enhance students' academic performance and employability⁴. Internationally focused degree programmes also enable universities in Wales to attract the best and brightest undergraduate students to their courses. The NAFSA conference enables universities in Wales to raise their profile globally, but especially in the US and Canada. This enables them to develop increased Study Abroad agreements (fee paying, incoming students for an academic year, semester or term, or summer programme) and articulation agreements with international universities. It is essential that we ensure that universities in Wales are able to continue to form these strategic partnerships to enable mobility activities, to remain competitive on the global stage. Wales' participation at NAFSA is critical for universities in Wales to develop these relationships and partnerships.

⁴[Gone International Report](#) (2015)

It is not just universities that are benefitting from a presence at NAFSA. Increasing the research links and student mobility between universities in Wales and the USA also stimulates partnerships with industry, encouraging continuing investment in Wales which in turn has a positive impact on the Welsh economy. Aberystwyth University, Bangor University and Cardiff University for example have built close relationships with their Welsh cohorts in the USA, whose main task is promoting Wales for tourism, education, and business development. A range of American companies have relocated to Wales, or have opened branch offices here, for example, GE Healthcare, OSTC Trading Company, and Hartswood Films. There has also been substantial growth in industrial links in the creative industries, energy and natural resources, as well as in scientific and manufacturing partnerships. The USA is a significant investor in Wales, and it is vital for Wales to build on its profile at the event.

Further thought and discussion is needed on how Wales' NAFSA activity fits in with an enhanced export approach to international students and education in Wales, of the sort being pursued by the UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) initiative 'Education UK⁵' and the WG's 'Partnership for Growth' strategy. For Wales, NAFSA is a key opportunity to create new relationships for student exchanges, recruit incoming students, and to promote outward mobility for students in Wales to study in other countries. NAFSA provides a platform to advertise Wales as a country on the global stage, promote tourism, enable departmental exchanges and promote industry links for Wales and for universities in Wales.

9. Recommendations following NAFSA 2015

The key recommendations from Wales' NAFSA representatives following the 2014 conference and exhibition included: securing a continued presence at NAFSA going forward; securing a funding package comprising of university, government and British Council sponsorship early enough to book a prime location; to create a sharp new branding campaign; and to explore corporate sponsorship opportunities.

The vast majority of the recommendations from last year's conference have been achieved. For example, the launch of Study in Wales in time for NAFSA 2015 enabled Wales to showcase its distinctive new brand for the first time at the conference. Also, the new Global Wales partnership has set out a three year plan to support Wales' NAFSA activities going forward. Global Wales is currently in a position to provide match-funding of £27,000 for NAFSA 2016. However, this is dependent on a sufficient number of Welsh universities committing to invest in the stand. Without this it will be difficult to book a prime location in time for NAFSA 2016.

The key recommendations for 2016 are therefore as follows:

1. To secure a commitment of £5000 each from the Welsh universities keen to participate on the stand of £5000 (or £500 from those opting out of the stand and taking part in the reception). This will form part of the funding package already

⁵ [Education UK](#)

secured and agreed by the Global Wales partners and should be early enough in the NAFSA timetable, ideally by end September 2015, to ensure a prime location and significant and professional presence in the exhibition hall.

2. To ensure the Wales booth is located within the 'UK sector' in the exhibition hall, to emphasise that Wales is part of the UK – alongside the BC pavilion and the Study in Scotland stand. This is to a large extent dependent on the outcome of Recommendation 1.
3. To ensure enough scope for universities to display individual branding on the Study in Wales stand.
4. To use the WG, BC and Welsh university networks to explore corporate sponsorship for a NAFSA reception, for example, a Welsh drinks company. If successful, explore celebrity alumni, noteworthy academics, or honorary degree holders to 'host' the reception event.

10. The future of Wales at NAFSA: Next Steps

The 2016 NAFSA annual conference and exhibition is taking place from 29 May – 3 June in Denver, Colorado. The conference theme is 'Building Capacity for Global Learning'.

Universities Wales will be discussing proposals at its Autumn 2015 committee meeting to reflect on how Wales' NAFSA activity dovetails with Global Wales' priority markets activities; the US looks highly likely to emerge as a priority market for the partnership.

Annex A: Photographs from NAFSA 2015

NAFSA Expo Hall and Study in Wales Booth (before opening of Expo Hall)



The Study in Wales Booth



Booth Launch of Study in Wales



Partner meetings taking place on the Booth

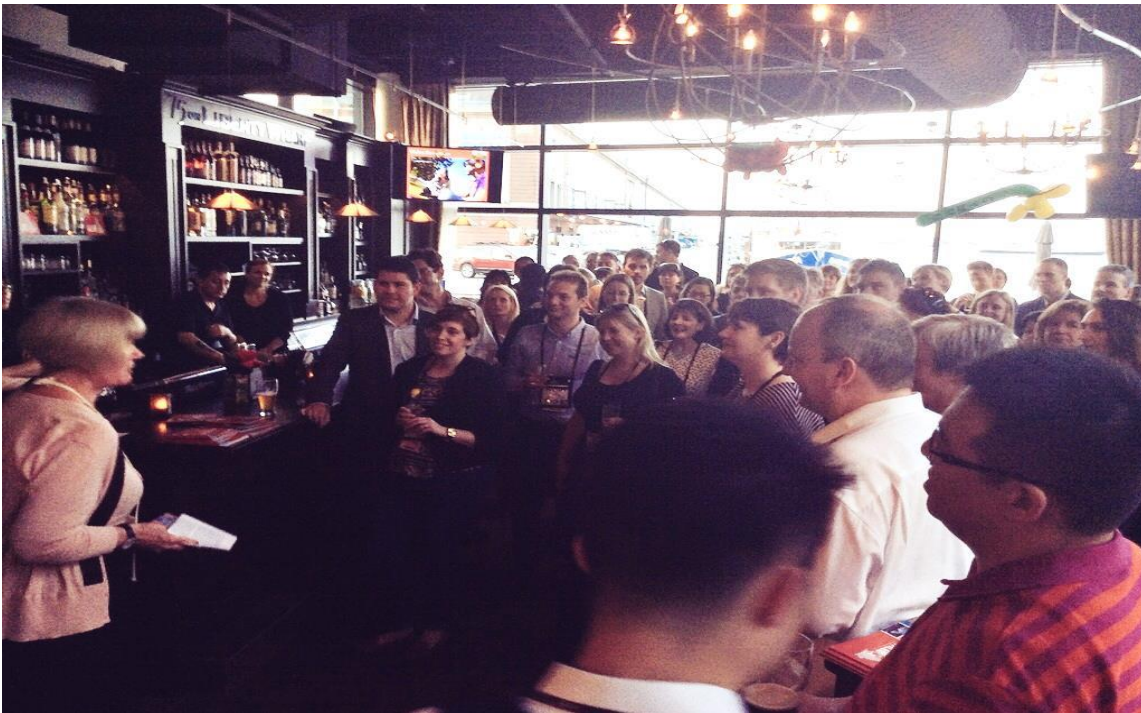


A selection of other booths (Japan, British Council, Sweden, Norway)





Professor McMahon delivering her speech at Study in Wales launch / Wales reception



Annex B: Study in Waes booth – 3D rendering with graphics

Study in Wales 20x30



Study in Wales 20x30

