

TCA05 Taith

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Adolygiad o weithrediad y Cytundeb Masnach a Chydweithredu rhwng y DU a'r UE | UK-EU implementation review of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement

Ymateb gan: Taith | Evidence from: Taith

Terms of Reference

The committees would welcome your views on:

- your experiences of the TCA since its entry into force;

Taith is the Welsh Government's International Learning Exchange Programme. It was created in response to the UK Government's decision to withdraw from the [Erasmus+](#) programme in December 2020. We are a funding agency that provides funding to organisations in the Schools, Youth, Adult Education, Further Education, Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education sectors in Wales.

Since the launch of the Taith programme, we have interacted with international stakeholders involved in international mobilities, both as funding agencies and as participants. One of the concerns that has been consistently highlighted is the fact that since the UK left the European Union, it has become more difficult for young people and vocational trainees to get visas to do a volunteering or work experience in Wales and the UK. Likewise, Welsh participants have faced difficulties in obtaining visas to undertake a similar experience in EU countries.

Another outcome of the UK leaving the EU and not participating in programmes like Erasmus+ is the loss of access to networks, expertise and best practise and the ability to collaborate with European partners to improve the Welsh education system. The Research sector has benefitted from the UK joining [Horizon Europe](#), but there has not been an equivalent opportunity for other sectors.

- areas of UK-EU cooperation covered by the TCA, and areas that are not covered;
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We would like to encourage a discussion about current visa regulations that would result in fewer restrictions for the mobility of young people, learners and trainees between the UK and the EU. The current visa requirements have been particularly damaging for the Skills/VET sector and young people participating in volunteering opportunities overseas. From our conversations with European partners, we understand that there is still a high level of interest in international apprenticeships mobilities, but they are hindered by the visa regulations. This results in Welsh/UK apprentices missing out on the opportunity to improve their learning and skills, and to build international networks that would bring benefit to Welsh businesses and the Welsh economy. Similarly, we have received feedback that a number of youth volunteering mobilities have had to be cancelled/rearranged due to the challenges of obtaining a visa.

- the effectiveness of the TCA in practice, including whether you have been affected by any implementation issues;
- areas of the TCA that are not fully implemented, such as UK participation in EU programmes or mutual recognition of professional qualifications;

Accessing funding provided by Erasmus+ when the UK was a member state of the European Union was challenging for some organisations in Wales because of the complexity of the application process. Taith has attempted to address this issue by creating a tailor-made programme for Wales that aims to be accessible for all. As a result, we have seen increased international engagement across all the sectors we fund, including many organisations that are delivering international exchanges for the first time. A return to Erasmus+ and the loss of Taith would likely see a reduction in the number of organisations and individuals engaging with international exchange in Wales.

However, being able to participate in Erasmus+ can be beneficial for larger organisations like universities and some Welsh FE colleges. We would encourage a discussion around access to larger funding programmes like Erasmus+, as complementary to the Taith programme. It would also be good to explore what opportunities there could be to collaborate with smaller national or regional programmes like the [North Rhine Westphalia Exchange](#), which funds internships for German trainees.

- unintended consequences that you have experienced; and

Whether intended or not, the fact that the barriers to mobility have not been addressed in the current trade and Cooperation Agreement results in barriers to exchanges and missed opportunities for young people to develop an international outlook, enhance their career prospects, and contribute to the development, global outlook and prosperity of Wales.

- changes to the UK-EU relationship you would like to see.

As referenced above, a change in the current visa regulations would provide more opportunities for Welsh young people to have a life-transforming or career-changing experience.

Also, being full members of EU education programmes and networks would give Wales access to expertise and new ideas for improving education and the ability to shape the direction and priorities for international education programmes.
