

WGIR14 Colleges Wales

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

[Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol](#) | [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee](#)

[Strategaeth Ryngwladol Llywodraeth Cymru](#) | [Welsh Government's International Strategy](#)

Ymateb gan: Collegau Cymru | Evidence from: Colleges Wales

1. What is your relationship, if any, to the International Strategy?

CoegauCymru/CollegesWales Ltd is an education charity which promotes the public benefit of further education (FE) in Wales. CollegesWales International leads on delivering overseas development opportunities for both learners and staff in FE.

Wales' FE colleges play an important role on the international stage, building purposeful partnerships that promote Wales, its culture and language. Some of our member colleges undertake commercial work overseas and some hold Tier 4 sponsorship licenses so that they can recruit international learners. These learners are primarily recruited onto A level courses.

In 2023/24, over 1200 FE learners participated in overseas visits to 28 countries around the world including Argentina, Nepal, Slovenia and Canada. In addition, 97 staff from the FE sector undertook CPD opportunities overseas through Taith funded projects with many of these visits having an impact on provision and delivery in the FE colleges. Spending time studying, volunteering, training or on work placements abroad broadens horizons, strengthens key skills, and brings benefits not only to individual participants but also to communities and organisations here in Wales.

CollegesWales International has an Internationalisation Strategy (2022-2026)¹ with a mission to create global citizens and networks. The four strategic priorities provide a framework for our international activities and focus on: inspirational

¹ [CollegesWales International - Internationalisation Strategy Eng](#)

global experiences; leadership, teaching and learning; purposeful partnerships and promoting Wales and developing international business.

We collaborate with our network of partners overseas to offer international enrichment and enhancement opportunities to FE learners and staff. We also encourage reciprocal visits so that our partners can come to Wales for study, training and to share good practice. These opportunities are made possible through funded mobility programmes such as the Welsh Government international learning exchange programme, Taith, and the UK Government international opportunities programme, the Turing Scheme. Partnerships have also been developed through Global Wales 3 funding and British Council programmes.

Linking these activities to Welsh Government's International Strategy is challenging as the only education sector that features in the strategy is Higher Education.

2. What are your views on the Welsh Government's International Strategy – what's worked well and any areas for improvement?

When the international strategy was published, the sector welcomed Welsh Government efforts to provide a strategic direction to its international relations so that FE colleges and ColegauCymru could align themselves to its key priorities and ensure a cohesive approach to promoting Wales on the global stage. Unfortunately, reference to, and acknowledgement of, the role of education in supporting Welsh Government to achieve some of its international ambitions, were minimal.

Areas of improvement would be to:

- acknowledge the 'soft power' role that all education sectors play in raising Wales' international profile
 - include FE colleges, alongside universities, as important, globally connected institutions that are able to strengthen and extend Wales' international presence and impact
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- highlight Wales' success at Worldskills² events as this showcases the importance of high quality skills training in Wales to attract inward investment.

3. What are your views on the Welsh Government's priority international relationships for 2022-25?

European countries continue to be important for FE colleges in relation to learner mobilities and in providing partnerships for staff continuing professional development (CPD) and the exchange of good practice. Through the Global Wales 3 programme, there have been opportunities for senior staff in FE colleges to engage with key players in the automotive industry in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany with a particular focus on the development of higher level skills and the integration of green skills into vocational qualifications.

Also, working with partners in Finland, CollegesWales International has recently completed a Taith Pathway 2 project focused on Vocational Qualification Reform and the implementation of Medr. A delegation of senior FE staff including ColegauCymru staff and Welsh Government officials travelled to Helsinki in April 2024 to gain an insight into Finland's national VET strategy and the importance of linking the strategy to Finland's economic and industrial priorities³. The findings from this report were shared at ColegauCymru's Annual Conference in October 2024.

Further afield, following the signing of an memorandum of understanding (MOU) between CollegesWales International, Universities Wales and Colleges and Institutes Canada in April 2023, a number of partnerships have developed between Wales' FE colleges and community colleges in Canada. An example is highlighted below.

Pembrokeshire College, working with the College of North Atlantic, Newfoundland, led a Knowledge Transfer Project into Renewable Energy and Females in Engineering. In March 2024, seven members of staff from Pembrokeshire College travelled to Newfoundland, Canada to learn more about

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In Autumn 2025, the WorldSkills finals are being hosted in Wales – a significant opportunity for Wales to raise the profile of our skills offer - WorldSkills UK | <https://www.worldskillsuk.org/>

³ [Wales learning from Finland - Strategies for Moving Freely: The Finnish Approach to Vocational Education and Training](#)

curriculum developments in green energies such as Hydrogen and Wind technologies.

The college has since become involved in opportunities around Hydrogen and Wind energy, such as designing training facilities, curriculum development, and staff training/upskilling. College staff were also able to learn from Canadian partners about their delivery of higher-level skills. Pembrokeshire College already delivers to the Hydrogen Carbon sector and this visit helped the college to diversify its offer by supporting other sectors too. The visit provided opportunities for staff development, both face to face and online. This project highlights how engaging with Canada has had a positive impact on both staff development, curriculum planning and the Welsh economy.

FE colleges have developed partnerships in India through Global Wales 3 and Taith funding. The focus has been on entrepreneurship, train the trainer projects for vocational qualifications in electric vehicle maintenance and start up/incubator projects.

Welsh Government's priority international relationships have the potential to build Wales' economy and lead to a greener future. The FE sector is committed to supporting Welsh Government's international ambitions and would welcome a clearer focus on the role that education and skills can play in promoting Wales on the world stage.

4. What are your views on the availability of information on the Welsh Government's international activities and delivery of the strategy?

We are unaware of any updates from Welsh Government on the delivery of the strategy. ColegauCymru's International Project Manager has monthly meetings with an official from the International Education team but this does not include an update on the delivery of the strategy.

5. In your view, what information on the Welsh Government's international activities should be in the public domain?

6. What are your views on how the Welsh Government's international activity is resourced?

ColegauCymru wishes to see a long term commitment to the continuation of government funding for overseas mobilities for learners and staff. For learners,

these opportunities raise aspirations, strengthen key skills and support young people to develop global mindsets. For staff, funded opportunities to exchange knowledge, expertise and ideas with organisations overseas inform policy and lead to improvements in provision and delivery in Wales.

7. What priorities and priority relationships would you like to see included in the Welsh Government's approach to international relations beyond 2025?

We would like to see the following priorities in the Welsh Government's approach to international relations beyond 2025:

- increase stakeholder engagement to ensure that there is a cohesive approach to promoting Wales on the international stage
- incentives to engage more FE college leaders and staff in outward and inward trade delegations
- include, in a future iteration of the international strategy, the role that all education sectors play in promoting Wales, its culture and language through 'soft power' activities
- reference the importance of overseas mobility as a way of promoting Wales globally by highlighting Taith and providing case studies to demonstrate its impact
- link the priorities of Wales' economic strategy with the international strategy
- clarify the role of Welsh Government overseas offices and encourage them to engage more actively with educational organisations

8. Are there any other matters you would like to draw to the Committee's attention regarding the Welsh Government's international relations?

As set out in ColegauCymru's Demonstrating Social Value report⁴, the number of learner participants in the Erasmus+ projects have increased steadily, from 0 in 2014 to 876 in 2020. This outcome is matched by huge increases in funding available. In 2014, there was no funding available for this project, however by 2020 there was €2,189,577 in funding available. Following the UK's exit from the European Union, Erasmus+ was replaced by the Turing scheme by the UK government, with Taith Pathway projects being available for Welsh learners. Although this has only been running for a short period of time, uptake has been

⁴ [Demonstrating the Social Value of FE colleges in Wales - Full Report Eng.pdf](#)

strong, with a total of 875 students on the two schemes in 2021, which is the latest year with full data availability)

The Taith and Turing programmes that provide funding for international opportunities and need to be referenced in Welsh Government's International Strategy as they are the only sources of funding available for learner and staff mobilities. The funding for both programmes has reduced year on year since they were launched.

In addition, Taith is due to end in 2026 and the Global Wales 3 programme, which is also funded via Taith, will end earlier than initially planned, in July 2025. With minimum references to any education sector, other than HE, in the current iteration of the Welsh Government's international strategy, it is critical that due thought and consideration is given to the future of internationalisation within all education sectors in Wales, particularly as the post-16 sector undergoes its transition into a tertiary sector regulated by Medr.

The international activities undertaken by FE colleges should not be viewed in isolation, but a core part of the efforts towards delivering the wellbeing goals as set out in the Future Generations (Wales) Act. One example from Coleg y Cymoedd shows the collaboration between the college with a Welsh manufacturer and a number of international organisations to investigate how human activity is affecting wildlife across the world. The global acoustic monitoring project to study wildlife using sounds from nature has seen Coleg y Cymoedd team up with semi-conductor manufacturer, Newport Wafer Fab, and Welsh TV and film professional, William Todd-Jones, alongside a network of creative and environmental partners; Wild Connect, Natural Resources Wales and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The relationship with Namibia came as a result of project partner and environmentalist William Todd-Jones' longstanding involvement with wildlife charities in Africa.

The project focuses on comparing levels of biodiversity, in this case the variety of wildlife, in both Wales and Africa, by monitoring the sounds of animals and ecosystems in the regions using specialist remote sound recorders called 'Biophones'. Wild Connect, an environmental consultancy, saw a need to develop a robust audio monitoring device – a Biophone – that both professional and amateur conservationists could use to record and analyse sounds from nature. The result is a device that is valuable to science in the area of eco-acoustics and a tool that can help re-engage the public with the natural world. Within the wild, animals use sounds for a number of reasons, from communication and navigation to hunting and territorial defence. Analysing these sounds can provide ecologists and conservationists with rich data about the environment and animal

populations, helping them understand where certain species live, how many there are and what they are doing. This can help to reveal behavioural and population changes as well highlight the impact of human activity on local wildlife. As part of the pilot project, staff and learners from across Coleg y Cymoedd's Engineering and Creative departments joined forces with Wild Connect, Newport Wafer Fab, CSA Catapult, and GX-Group to create 35 Biophones. The devices have been placed around Wales and Namibia, allowing the monitoring and analysis of pan-Wales data, together with wildlife agencies gathering the data from the Namibian deployment. Both sets of recordings will be analysed to provide regional environmental insights and evidence of ecosystem diversity between the two areas. The findings will help reveal how the contrasting climates, human population levels, and degrees of development in Wales and Namibia affect the surrounding natural world in the two regions. This is a tangible example of how colleges are contributing towards a globally responsible Wales.
