



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru The National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes The Enterprise and Business Committee

**Dydd Mercher, 12 Mawrth 2014
Wednesday, 12 March 2014**

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol Committee members in attendance

Mick Antoniw

Llafur
Labour

Rhun ap Iorwerth	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Keith Davies	Llafur Labour
Yr Arglwydd/Lord Elis-Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
William Graham	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Conservatives (Committee Chair)
Julie James	Llafur Labour
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Jessica Blair	Dadansoddwr Polisi, y Sefydliad Materion Cymreig Policy Analyst, Institute of Welsh Affairs
Barbara Burchell	Prif Swyddog Datblygu Prosiectau Ewropeaidd, Gwasanaeth Datblygu Cymunedol, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy Principal European Project Development Officer, Community Development Service, Conwy County Borough Council
Filippo Compagni	Rheolwr Cyllid a Phrosiectau Ewropeaidd, Cyngor Sir Powys European Funding and Projects Manager, Powys County Council
Yr Athro/Professor Russell Deacon	Darlithydd Hanes a Gwleidyddiaeth, Coleg Gwent Lecturer in History and Politics, Coleg Gwent
Sharron Lusher	Pennaeth, Coleg Sir Benfro Principal, Pembrokeshire College
Helen Morgan	Uwch Rheolwr, Canolfan Ewropeaidd Gorllewin Cymru, Cyngor Sir Gâr Senior Manager, West Wales European Centre, Carmarthenshire County Council
Simon Stewart	Uwch Ddarlithydd ym Mhrifysgol Glyndŵr ac Aelod o Bwyllgor Connect Cymru Senior Lecturer at Glyndŵr University and Connect Cymru Committee Member
Sharon Thomas	Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredol, ECTARC Executive Director, ECTARC
Helen Wales	Cyfarwyddwr, UNA Cyfnewid Director, UNA Exchange
Dr Greg Walker	Dirprwy Brif Weithredwr, ColegauCymru Deputy Chief Executive, ColegauCymru

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Gregg Jones	Swyddfa'r UE EU Office
Olga Lewis	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Siân Phipps	Clerc Clerk

Anne Thomas

Gwasanaeth Ymchwil
Research Service

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:19.
The meeting began at 09:19.*

Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **William Graham:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I welcome you to our meeting this morning. The meeting is bilingual and headphones can be used for simultaneous translation from Welsh to English on channel 1 or for amplification on channel 0. The meeting is being broadcast and a transcript of the proceedings will be published later. May I remind Members to turn off their mobile phones and any other electronic equipment? Members and witnesses, there is no need to touch the microphones, because they will come on automatically. In the unlikely event of a fire alarm, we should follow the directions of the ushers.

09:20

Ymchwiliad i Gyfleoedd Cyllido yr UE 2014-2020 (Sesiwn 1) Inquiry into EU Funding Opportunities 2014-2020 (Session 1)

[2] **William Graham:** I welcome Professor Deacon this morning. Thank you very much. May I ask you to state your name and occupation for the record?

[3] **Professor Deacon:** My name is Professor Russell Deacon. I am a lecturer in government and politics, currently, mainly at Coleg Gwent.

[4] **William Graham:** Thank you. This is the first formal evidence session of this inquiry—I am sorry, it is the second, as we had an informal meeting with Cardiff Metropolitan University last week, but this is the first of our formal sessions taking actual evidence.

[5] Perhaps I could start and ask you about the low levels of participation in Erasmus. Thank you for your written evidence. May I ask you to describe to the committee what you think are the root causes of why students outside of language programmes fail to take up those places?

[6] **Professor Deacon:** I will just give you a bit of background. I was connected closely with the Erasmus programmes for about 20 years. During the end of that process, before I got made redundant from Cardiff Metropolitan University, I undertook quite a lot research on that very question across universities in south Wales, specifically within what was then the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff. I had been operational in running the programme, so I was very interested to know why we could not motivate more students. What happened was that when we did manage to get those students to go out, they came back almost like religious converts saying, 'Why on earth don't more people do Erasmus?' So, I thought, let us look in depth and see why we cannot get them to do so.

[7] I managed to do that in a study and the results of that were published in February 2011. I do not know whether you have the written paper, but in that, there are some nice little tables and graphs and perhaps the most useful is the graph on page 14—these were the reasons that we had for them not undertaking it. Surprisingly, the biggest reason was that most of the students in post-1992 institutions were not interested in going on Erasmus for a

whole year. They were too nervous or apprehensive to do so and they thought that it meant missing out the whole second year of their studies, and lecturers often carried over that apprehension saying, 'We don't know how you can miss a whole year of study and go from year 1 to year 3'. So, they only went for six-month periods, or three-month periods. I do not know how familiar you are with it, but you could go on a kind of termly basis.

[8] One of the other problems was that, because universities across Europe operate on different term times, coinciding or matching with UK ones was often a problem. For example, German universities did not start until late or mid October, finished their first semester in April and then they would go on until July. In UK institutions, by April, you have virtually finished the academic year. So, sometimes it was possible for them to complete almost an entire year here, then go over and study for the last period, but it was about swapping these things around.

[9] However, why that is connected to the first issue is that students here could not get short-term accommodation. Students tend to go on Erasmus in their second year of the programme, so they are not linked with halls of residence, and if they went to a private landlord, the private landlord wanted them to sign up for the year. Private landlords would sometimes offer them the option, if they could get another tenant in, or swap, then they could go on that exchange, but it was very difficult for them to be able to do that, even though we operated a scheme for incoming Erasmus students to swap with them. What we found was that the incoming Erasmus students would not take accommodation blindly, so they would not take it on trust that the outgoing student's accommodation was okay and, therefore, they preferred to look for themselves.

[10] Therefore, it was the fact that they were locked into these all-year rental agreements that stopped more than half of the students choosing to go on Erasmus, which was the bulk of those going out. So, that was the biggest thing. They were also concerned that they did not have sufficient language skills. However, at UWIC we then linked only with universities that offered their provision through the medium of English, and one of the things about universities across Europe now is that they have got considerable portions of their programmes in English. So, language was not a barrier for academic purposes. However, we did try to encourage the students to learn some conversational language before they went. However, outside of Germany, France or Spain, it is virtually impossible to get any conversational language learning. For example, some students wished to go to Estonia, Bulgaria or Greece, and there was no language provision that they could get before they went out there. Those countries often offer four-week compact learning sessions, but we were unable to get students to go outside of the mainstream countries, although we did get some students to go to Estonia and to Portugal.

[11] There were domestic things. Simply, they did not want to study abroad. A third of people did not want to leave their partner, which locked them in. There were also financial issues. Those people who are lecturing in higher education now will be aware that most students outside of their final year are virtually working full time in what we call part-time work. So, they did not feel that they could leave those sources of income and just rely on the Erasmus grant. They did not wish to study abroad. A quarter of people simply were not aware of the Erasmus grant scheme, even though we actually spoke to them all several times about this beforehand. So, they did have the information; it was instructive for us. They were concerned about how it would affect their studies. The other thing was that none of their friends were going. One of the things that was quite apparent was that of the 100% of people who initially wanted to go, in the end, you would get only 25% actually going. One of the drop-off points was either that they had decided with a buddy, 'We'll both go together,' and then the buddy would drop out and they would drop out, or there would be a group that came, saying, 'All four of us want to go to Cyprus,' then one would drop out and the other three would drop out. So, that seemed to be a connection thing.

[12] One thing that would seem to be common among the Erasmus students who did go out was that they were travellers anyway, so they were people who had been on a gap year and had travelled a lot. Alternatively, they had a family member who had also been on Erasmus and they had been so positive about it that they connected, or they were loner individuals who would just go and do things regardless, so they would sign up and were not friend dependent.

[13] There were family considerations. They were also concerned about what would happen if they failed, because one of the academic problems is that it is difficult to retrieve modules when you fail them at a university and you are not there, because you need to be in the institution in order to retake them. However, most of the universities are very sympathetic to Erasmus students, so they would allow them to retake or resit them when they were there. However, of course, students are not aware of that until they actually go on the programme.

[14] They simply were not interested in the places that they were going to. The other thing that we discovered was that British students like to go to places where you would go on holiday anyway. So, Cyprus was popular, Portugal was popular and Spain—

[15] **Mick Antoni**: Benidorm.

[16] **Professor Deacon**: We were not linked up with Benidorm, but if we were, it would have been popular. Northern European countries were not popular. Tragically, we did not manage to get any students to go out to Germany, and Germany was always the most hospitable country for Erasmus students and always the keenest to get them out there. They would facilitate the students getting part-time work and extra bursaries, grants and things like that. However, we could not get students to go to Germany and we only got one to go to Estonia. So, it was those warmer climes that Welsh students wanted to go to. Cyprus was very popular and Portugal was as well.

[17] Sometimes, none of the subjects offered to them, they felt, were relevant to them. That was really something that was outside of our control. Although we did work with the university halls of residence and they would offer students places in halls of residence as long as they could get someone to fill in at the other side, it seemed to be the all-year rental agreements that were the main problem.

[18] **William Graham**: Thank you. I call on Keith.

09:30

[19] **Keith Davies**: Gwnaf i ofyn yn Gymraeg—a diolch, Gadeirydd. O ddarllen eich papur, mae eich papur wedi cael yr holl wybodaeth o fyfyrwyr sydd yn UWIC ac nid oddi wrth golegau eraill. Y cwestiwn sydd gen i yw: pa mor bwysig yw'r sefydliadau fel rhwystrau i'r myfyrwyr, a'r adrannau y tu mewn i'r sefydliadau? Beth ydych chi'n meddwl yw'r rhwystrau?

Keith Davies: I will ask my question in Welsh—and thank you, Chair. Having read your paper, your paper gained all the information from UWIC students and not other colleges. The question that I have is: how important are these institutions as an obstacle to these students, and departments within these institutions? What are the barriers for those students?

[20] **Professor Deacon**: I am sorry, I did not realise that there is an echo effect on the headphone.

[21] It was undertaken with UWIC students for the data that you have here, but I also worked with the Erasmus officers for the universities across Wales with the results of the

study and with the people on the British Council to check those. I also checked them against a large study that was undertaken on Erasmus across the UK by the Sussex Centre for Migration Research. So, the results were also pegged against that. So, I know that they are consistent with that. Does that answer your question?

[22] **Keith Davies:** Nac ydy, ddim yn gyfan. Mae'r colegau yn wahanol mewn ffordd, ond mae adrannau y tu mewn i'r colegau. Yr hyn roeddwn i'n ei glywed gan y myfyrwyr wythnos diwethaf yng Nghyncoed oedd eu bod nhw'n synnu cyn lleied o'n myfyrwyr ni a oedd yn mynd ar Erasmus. Roedd un yn enwedig—roeddech chi'n sôn am yr Almaen gynnu—a oedd wedi mynd i brifysgol yn yr Almaen, ac roedd hi'n sôn am y cannoedd o fyfyrwyr Almaenig a oedd yn dod draw i'r wlad hon. Felly, pam nad yw ein myfyrwyr ni eisiau bod yn rhan o Erasmus? A yw hynny'n rhywbeth i wneud â'r sefydliad, neu a yw hynny'n rhywbeth i wneud â'r adrannau mewn sefydliadau? Beth sy'n ein rhwystro ni o gymharu â'r Almaen?

Keith Davies: No, not entirely. The colleges are different in a way, but there are departments within the colleges as well. What I heard from students last week in Cyncoed was that they were surprised by how few of our students went on the Erasmus programmes. One in particular—you were talking about Germany earlier—had gone to a German university and she said that there were hundreds of German students who come over to this country. So, why do our students not want to be part of Erasmus? Is it something to do with the institutions or the departments within those institutions? What are the barriers as compared, say, to Germany?

[23] **Professor Deacon:** In Germany, often, for example, when we connected with departments for teacher training, the students were unable to gain employment unless they did spend a period abroad. So, it was compulsory, and if it was not compulsory, they would not expect to get an opportunity in employment. The more people that go on it, the more it encourages others and others feel concerned that they have stayed behind.

[24] The biggest barrier that I have come across in the institutions is that the institutions do not facilitate or encourage academics to engage within the programme beyond some participation within it. So, what happens is that you lack expertise within the institution. So, students are obviously quite concerned that very few people go out there. They do not want to experiment on themselves; they want to see students who have been successful and gone on it, and they also want academic processes to know that it can be successful.

[25] One of the issues that we came across was that there is no recognition on your degree that you have obtained those credits within another university. When I was at UWIC, we did try with the registry to include it, so that when it said, 'You got this degree from the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff', it also said that it was with a period of study in Ghent University, so that it was recorded on your certificate. You could then see that that was a demonstration.

[26] I am afraid that I think that the biggest barrier is that you do not have academics like me in there, who are able to encourage students to go and who are able to answer their questions, because I know, because I have gone through the process and I have the experience. So, when students come and say, 'We're concerned about this' or 'When we go out there, we've got this', I have the knowledge and I am able to reassure them. Also, I was able to network closely with the universities they were going out to, so that when I got those phone calls, when they were in an absolute panic that they had failed everything, and were saying, 'It's a disaster; why did you send us out here, because we're going to fail our degrees?', I could speak to the departments and say, 'They are really concerned about this'. Then, the department would speak to them and say, 'Look, you don't need to be concerned, you're doing okay'. So, it about having that working relationship with them.

[27] I would say that all of the institutions that I worked with, aside from those universities in France, were very good. There was a particular problem with France, in that the institutions were so large and massive that the students would go out there and they would go to register or something and they would not be able to do it successfully. Then, they would find someone who would say, 'Come back in three weeks' or something, and there was no comfort for them. The other institutions worked very well, however, and in the case of the German institutions, for instance, they would actually have their students meet the British ones off the trains, take them back and integrate them effectively in that way. For those, it was always very nice; once they were out there, they were reassured quite quickly.

[28] **William Graham:** We have a supplementary question.

[29] **Mick Antoniwi:** You gave some data about pre-1992 institutions and post-1992 institutions and the variations there, which were very much from the subjective view of the students. However, it seems to me that what you are suggesting is that there is almost a lack of any strategic consistency within the education system in terms of the benefits of utilisation, and all of the spin-offs that I am sure we will explore later. I have seen evidence in other bits of evidence that have come in that, educationally, the institutions are more interested in fees from foreign students than they are in the expansive benefits of students going abroad. Is that—

[30] **Professor Deacon:** That is totally correct. Even before the academic pinch it was very difficult—. If I could go, later on, into the benefits of Erasmus, there are huge benefits that Wales, as a nation, does not tap into, which is an incredible shame and I can expand on some of those issues.

[31] **William Graham:** Perhaps I could bring Joyce in there.

[32] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, if we are going to expand. Thank you, Chair. The benefits have to be two-way—to the students who are going out and to the students who are coming in. That is one part of it. There are benefits to the students and the academics. What do you think are the core benefits in that respect?

[33] **Professor Deacon:** The benefits for those coming in or for those going out?

[34] **Joyce Watson:** Well, because it is a fluid movement—and you have talked about that—I am asking about the benefits to Wales from receiving students here and to the students who are going over to wherever it is that they go, assuming that they have a good experience.

[35] **Professor Deacon:** I think that one of the overriding benefits for those going out is that it changes their mindset. It is interesting that one of the students who came back said that they felt that Wales was now too small for them. They had gone out and they had stretched their horizons. You get people who are quite shy and introverted and they come back a lot more self-confident. So, when we are talking about creating a nation of entrepreneurs, you push that mindset there, because they go and they expand beyond that. Also, one of the things about Erasmus is that it is a great networker. One of the frequent comments was that Erasmus meant never having to pay for holidays again, because you met so many people that you could travel all over Europe. That also works the other way around. I think that one of the great tragedies of the whole thing with Erasmus is that it has not been effectively networked for Wales as a nation. I was in the programme for 20 years and kept in contact with a number of those students, and I am aware that what you have with Erasmus is, normally, the brightest students coming to you. Of course, what happens is that, when the brightest students go home, they go into some of the best jobs. Within 10 to 15 years, they are the middle rank, and then they become the senior people. Part of my study was never published because I was made redundant and so the results were not published, but I did quite a lot about the values of

incoming students and connected up with those. What you discover is that they go to very senior positions. For example, one of the students that I first dealt with in 1992 became the marketing manager for Kraft Europe. Another student became head of the Siemens cultural programme.

[36] What reflects in them is that they have had very positive experience of studying in Wales, which is another benefit, because, academically, universities are very hooked up on quality assurance. They have a national student survey that looks at how students value their courses. However, what is ideal for you is having students that have studied at another institution, at a parallel programme internationally, who can compare their institution against yours. Constantly they said, in all of the feedback that I got, that our academic programmes are more effective than their own—even though, for instance, UWIC was linked up to some of the top 100 universities in Europe, for example, the University of Ghent and the University of Copenhagen. Those students said that our teaching and our academic programmes were more effective in stimulating their own academic development than were their own institutions.

[37] So, what you have there, respectively, is, first of all, you have students who are very positive about the academic experience, but, importantly for the academic institutions, students who also have experience of studying at the same level in other universities. So, they are able to compare. Often, when we ask for quality feedback from our students here, they have experience of only one institution. It is a bit like only ever shopping at Tesco and then being asked to compare that; you have experience only of the one place. They have experience of other places, so they are able to compare the two and it was always positive about the programme.

[38] As I said about the networking, I felt, with regard to the networking side, that, if that had been developed consistently, it would have been very beneficial for Wales economically because, when you have these overseas trade missions or connect up with that, you have a network of people within that country who have studied within Wales; they know Cardiff. One of the big problems across Europe is that most people are not aware of Wales. In fact, the students are unaware of it until they come here and you are able to feed into that.

[39] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** Do you want to just expand on the concrete ideas that could develop that economic side of things and build those economic links that could benefit Wales?

[40] **Professor Deacon:** One of the things, when you have the Erasmus students in, is that they are often invisible students. So, when you ask the lecturers, ‘Are you aware of the Erasmus students?’ they ask, ‘Oh, is it those three Italian girls who sit at the back of the class?’ et cetera, so they do not integrate with them. I made great steps to try to integrate those students with the British students and I did that through a process of pushing them all together, which was also positive for the British students because they said, ‘Oh, we really like working with Erasmus students. Can we have more next year?’ et cetera, so it worked positively for them. So, what you need to do, when they come here and have that positive experience, is to continue to develop that—

[41] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** How do you propose to develop it?

[42] **Professor Deacon:** These days, with social media and things such as that, you have the possibility to connect with them and work within their groups and remind them of the positive experience that they have had there, but also to have networking events within their own country, such as Germany, for example, or somewhere like that. So, you go over there and network with them, but, at the same time, because they are connected up with businesses et cetera, you can almost use it as a personal contact. So, you could say, for example, ‘We’ve

got a visit coming over here, could you get the Ministers to look around your company?' or whatever, so you have that kind of personal contact.

[43] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** All of that is sort of ad hoc. Are there semi-structured Erasmus alumni programmes, for example, that could actually—

[44] **Professor Deacon:** No. The British Council or someone would be able to tell you more about that than me. Probably, because of the volumes of them—there are several million—it is difficult to have ones connected, but you could certainly have ones connected with Wales and you could connect with those. One of the interesting things—I was there in the last year, in 2011—is that the students who were studying politics then became passionately engaged with the referendum on the 'yes' side. So, they engaged with that and integrated themselves with the Welsh nation. So, they felt quite a passion for Wales and I think you can build on that. It is a great shame is that we are not able to offer them an honorary Welsh citizenship, almost, or something like that—

[45] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** It could be arranged.

[46] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** I would not mind getting Welsh citizenship myself, but that is another story. *[Laughter.]*

[47] **Professor Deacon:** There could be something connected like that, whereby they have a permanent sense of Welsh identity, and then you can build on that to say that they are, sort of, honorary Welsh people.

[48] **William Graham:** Dafydd Elis-Thomas is next, please.

[49] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Thank you for stimulating us, Russell. I was particularly interested in the suggestions you have in your longer paper about providing both the home students with international learning experience that would increase their employability, and, at the same time, developing a more integrated and internationalised curriculum. It seems to me that those things go together.

[50] **Professor Deacon:** Yes. One of the good things about having students with international experience, or from that background within your class, is that, when you are talking about particular subjects, you can then ask, 'Well, what happens in Bulgaria?' or 'What was your experience when you were in Portugal?' so you have them to link across that. As I say, it changes people's mindset, so they are not focused within their local community; they have an international mindset there, which is very important for business and developing all sorts of things. They are not frightened of going over to another country and then working within it.

09:45

[51] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Following on from that, would you say that it would substantially benefit all of the further education and higher education institutions in Wales if we were to internationalise our curriculum generally across the board? Clearly, one could argue that, in the sciences, it is probably more generalised in that engineering is engineering, I suppose, but environmental studies is pretty generalised. Is there a way in which we can do more to make it attractive for people?

[52] **Professor Deacon:** Speaking from an academic perspective, that is only useful if it is resourced. Just saying 'internationalise the curriculum', does not mean much. You actually have to provide the resource or the teaching material behind it because there are many people within the teaching profession that have not travelled abroad, apart from on holiday. Also, we

have to be aware that internationalising means going global. There is a tendency to give western case studies, but if you are internationalising you really need to give case studies from Africa or Asia and bring all that in.

[53] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** May I ask just one more question?

[54] **William Graham:** We are almost out of time. You must be very quick.

[55] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** You mentioned German teachers having a requirement to spend time abroad. You mentioned, again, lecturers in Wales perhaps not having spent time abroad. Is it an issue in Wales that teaching professionals do not have a broad enough outlook?

[56] **Professor Deacon:** We found it difficult to get teaching professionals to go abroad, but one of the requirements for Erasmus is that you do not just go abroad, but you also have to deliver six or seven lectures to the students there. We discovered that people would say that they wanted to go, block the place, and then pull out from the place and deny someone else the place. So, that was an issue. You also get people who regularly go. There are some institutions where someone has been to the same place 20 times and they treat it as their kind of annual visit. So, they do not expand it out.

[57] **William Graham:** We are almost out of time. I will ask you the final question. May I have your views on the Riordan report in respect of outward mobility, and also your comment on the commitment by Cardiff University to a target of 17%?

[58] **Professor Deacon:** Sorry, I withdrew from the Erasmus programme in 2011, so I am not aware of what the Riordan report is. What was the last part of the question?

[59] **William Graham:** It was on the 17% target from Cardiff University.

[60] **Professor Deacon:** Cardiff University is one of the most effective in the UK for doing Erasmus. It is very well-structured for that. I do not know whether she is still there, but Rose Matthews is very effective in running that. However, what you have to look out for is that Cardiff University is very good, but the rest are quite poor. The one thing to note from my paper is that, if you are in a post-1992 institution, there is virtually no chance of you going on Erasmus. Some institutions do not send anyone. The one last factor is that Erasmus figures can hoodwink you. What you are not aware of from the figures is that around half of those are actually European nationals returning to their own countries. So, the figures include German students who will go to study, for example, at Cardiff University, and then return to Germany as part of their Erasmus. Therefore, it is only around half of those that are actually UK students. You also need to be aware of that.

[61] **William Graham:** Thank you very much. Thank you very much for the evidence that you have given today. There will be an opportunity to check the transcript of the evidence in due course. It will be sent to you in the next couple of days. Thank you very much for your attendance today.

09:51

Ymchwiliad i Gyfleoedd Cyllido yr Undeb Ewropeaidd 2014-20 (Sesiwn 2) **Inquiry into European Union Funding Opportunities 2014-20 (Session 2)**

[62] **William Graham:** Welcome to you all, and thank you very much for your attendance today. For the record, I ask each speaker to give their names and their titles. I also thank you for your written evidence.

[63] **Dr Walker:** I am Greg Walker, deputy chief executive of ColegauCymru.

[64] **Ms Lusher:** Good morning, I am Sharron Lusher, principal and chief executive of Pembrokeshire College.

[65] **Ms Blair:** I am Jessica Blair, policy analyst for the Institute of Welsh Affairs.

[66] **Ms Thomas:** I am Sharon Thomas, from the European Centre for Training and Regional Co-operation.

[67] **William Graham:** Thank you very much. Our first question is from Julie James.

[68] **Julie James:** We are just going in the order in which we have our evidence set out, so our questions are not in any priority order.

[69] I wonder whether ColegauCymru could just clarify some of the things that you have said in your paper about the types of European Union funding projects that you have become involved in. How they compare is what we are interested in. Therefore, how does the INTERREG Erasmus programme, which I think that you have just started on, compare with more mainstream structural funding, and that sort of thing? So we are interest in how the funding schemes feel, I suppose, to you.

[70] **Dr Walker:** Sure. There are two separate points to that I think. The first is the colleges' engagement with various strands of European funding, and then there is ColegauCymru's own engagement with the lifelong learning programme specifically. However, ColegauCymru itself has not directly participated in European social funds programmes through the structural funds. We have had an involvement directly and centrally in helping to co-ordinate central college-based engagement in the lifelong learning programmes, which hitherto has been called, as you will be aware, the Leonardo da Vinci programme. That is changing, as you know, to Erasmus+ from this year onwards, although there is still a final round of applications for Leonardo going on, as we speak; we will get used to the name for a little while longer.

[71] We have led that. Starting in 2010-11, as a central body, we led the engagement of the sector in Leonardo. It is not that there was not any engagement with the sector before that point—far from it—but we worked with the Welsh Government to ensure that the engagement was escalated, and that more learners had the opportunity to benefit from the mobility programmes in relation to vocational education and training. If I slip into the acronym 'VET', my apologies—that stands for vocational education and training. So that will be a new strand in Erasmus+, and we will continue our co-ordination work with colleges to ensure, again, that the number of learners who benefit escalates in the years to come. You will see from the table in the annex to our paper that there has been quite an increase in the number of learners who have engaged in these programmes. I think that that is a very positive outcome for Wales, and is certainly very positive for the learners themselves.

[72] **Julie James:** Remind me what sort of percentages we are talking about here. I saw the numbers, but—

[73] **Dr Walker:** That will be low; they will be low percentages in total, compared to the whole cohort of post-16 learners in Wales, necessarily. I think that all British educational institutions—all sectors and at all levels—have had a real challenge in motivating and engaging with some learners to demonstrate the potential benefits of engaging in the EU lifelong learning programmes. I think that you will probably be hearing about that this morning.

[74] **Julie James:** Do you have aspirations for what sort of percentages you would like to see, once it has bedded in a bit more perhaps?

[75] **Dr Walker:** As many as is practical to deliver, I think is the answer to that. Regarding the colleges in ColegauCymru, there are logistical requirements, as you can imagine, for putting on these exchange and mobility programmes, and they are obviously time-consuming and so on. However, organisations do get a management fee to cover that, so there is a sort of countervailing compensation there. I think that it would be more on—two points really—the demand side from the students and, secondly, the investment from the EU, getting the funding from, in our case, Ecorys, which runs the VET programme in the UK. So, those are probably the two factors: demand from students and then the funding from Erasmus+, as it will be called, to do that.

[76] **Julie James:** Are you running those programmes completely separately to the structural funds bidding that is going on? Are they linked together?

[77] **Dr Walker:** At the moment they are completely separate, although we are looking at ways in which there can be synergies between the two programmes, maybe in terms of mobility projects on specialist skills areas, for instance. That is worth exploring. There are some problems with the European regulations for these areas, which are quite separate, and quite different, and there are some potential issues about double-funding and all that sort of legal aspect, which we have to be very careful about. I think that one of the areas that is not quite as well known is the centrally administered funds for Erasmus+, run from Brussels rather than from the UK by the British Council at a high level or by Ecorys at the VET level. There is also funding for skills alliances that are run from Brussels. Hitherto, we have not run any of those projects, and there is some potential for us to engage in that. To that end, we have called meetings and we have attended meetings, which I allude to in the paper, with colleges and representative bodies in Scotland, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, to see whether we can explore the potential avenues there for accessing the centrally administered funds in Brussels. There is real money there.

[78] **William Graham:** Could I just ask ECTARC, particularly, about the programme support that you run for the Leonardo programme? You have been doing it for the last 10 years. Would you like to expand on that, on how successful it has been?

[79] **Ms Thomas:** ECTARC has been in existence since 1982. It is based in Llangollen in north Wales. We are a registered charity and non-profit-making organisation, and our work involves the mobility of young people, both to and from Europe. We have been working on the Leonardo programme for the past 16 years, mainly in an inward capacity for the first 10 years, and we have received in excess of 400 young people from different countries each year to spend up to six months in Wales for linguistic preparation and work-based learning. For the last 10 years, we have been sending students from Wales to Europe. They are all higher education recent graduates and undergraduates, and we are probably sending about 120 per year, funded under the Leonardo da Vinci programme. For the last three years we have been working with the GO Wales programme, and we have become the international arm of that initiative. The recruitment and selection of the graduates is through the GO Wales website. It is mainstreamed in Wales now, and we probably get in excess of 400 full applications per year for just over 100 places. So, three quarters of them do not get to go on the experience. We have received just under £3 million of EU funding in the last 10 years for this programme, and we have had co-funding from the Welsh Government of about £1 million. The co-funding from the Welsh Government has been spent on preparing the people to go on the programme. So, we run residential courses at our centre in Llangollen, linguistic preparation into cultural preparation, sessions on work ethics, et cetera, preparing them to work and live abroad. Our students go for a period of 13 weeks, which is quite a good chunk

to get a meaningful learning experience.

[80] Obviously, the Leonardo programme has come to an end this year. We have 50 places left to fill for this year, and we are bidding by Friday for the new Erasmus+ programme. What we have done in ECTARC is put together, based on our knowledge and experience, a consortium of all the universities across Wales, with ECTARC being the mobility co-ordinator, and we are bidding for 200 first-year graduates to take part in the programme, as we have done over previous years. However, we are formalising the consortium with the HEIs across Wales, both with Erasmus co-ordinators and the skills employability and careers departments. So, we are getting universities to work closer together within their own universities and with their academic departments, but we are managing the project.

10:00

[81] The problem that we have is that, under Erasmus+, for higher education, it is a very low budget. It is much lower than the VET provision offered. It is almost the same budget as the old academic study abroad budget, which is under €2,000 for a three-month experience. Under Leonardo, it was more than double that. So, the problem we have is the co-funding. So, we are approaching ESF and the Welsh European Funding Office to look at the co-funding aspect of the programme. Without looking at double funding, we are looking at aspects of the programme where we can be creative, where we can target disadvantaged postcodes and perhaps offer a different kind of preparation for people who will need it, using the co-funding to support that aspect of the programme. Of course, our organisation is a charity, so we would need a contribution to our overhead as well. The application is going in on Friday. We have all the universities in Wales on board with the consortium so, obviously, they feel that there is a need too. We hope—well, we know—that we can meet those targets.

[82] **Keith Davies:** With the Welsh partners, I understood what all of them were, except for one. Perhaps you could expand on that one. It was called the PDA team. It said City and Guilds professional development at Swansea University.

[83] **Ms Thomas:** That is a level 4 City and Guilds recognised qualification in quality work experience. So, they mentor the qualification while the participants are abroad. They look after the details and support the graduates while they are away in delivering those aspects of the award. So, they can complete it during the 10 weeks abroad. Once they come back, they have a fully recognised qualification, which will help them with employment. It is a win-win situation really. That is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the professional development award mentor, the participant abroad. The great drive now in Europe for people taking part in these experiences, whether for a week or six months, is to get a qualification from it. So, we really welcome that as an added benefit to the programme.

[84] **Keith Davies:** So, it is for graduates in Swansea, then?

[85] **Ms Thomas:** Across Wales.

[86] **Mick Antoniwi:** On the benefits of participation in this, I read your evidence. You had a couple of paragraphs on this, and I appreciate that it does not perhaps do justice to what your thinking is. So, could you be a bit more precise about the practical benefits of this, how you evaluate the benefit to those who participate in it and how you track the longer term benefits from this?

[87] **Ms Thomas:** Yes, we do that. The students who go away have to complete, at the end of their three months, a multi-tool assessment, which is a European tool that the European Commission has led. They feed in information about their experience and the European Commission looks at all those statistics. Obviously, when it is designing a new programme

such as Erasmus+, those statistics will show. So, six months after they return—if they return; some stay in Europe—we do a tracking survey. We ask them a number of questions by means of a questionnaire to see what they are doing now, how the programme has contributed to their employment et cetera. Those results are quite staggering. Every year, we send 100 to 120 graduates. We analyse the results of what they are doing now in the following six months. We have the statistics here: 61% are in full-time employment; 14% have gone on to professional training—a post-graduate certificate in education or equivalent; 13% are studying for a Master's degree; 8% are employed abroad; 2% are in part-time freelance work, 1% are in training and another 1% are working freelance. No-one was unemployed six months after returning. These are staggering figures.

[88] You asked about the benefits of students going on this programme; a lot of it is about personal development, confidence-building and self-esteem. That is what they get out of the experience. They live independently and there are numerous soft skills that they develop as a benefit of the experience. They also have the added value of working in an international environment, in a different linguistic setting. These are huge benefits that they can add on to their curriculum vitae so that, on returning to Wales, they have additional benefits to offer an employer. If you have a lot of graduates coming for an interview who all have a 2:1 in business studies, which one are you going to select when they all have the same qualifications? Who will stand out from the crowd? We know from experience that the students—and Jessica will talk about this in a moment—who go for an interview when they return from their three months abroad are more employable. They have the confidence and the interview skills, and they can demonstrate that they have worked in their field—they have work experience under their belts in a foreign country.

[89] **Mick Antoniw:** Do you believe that we prioritise this area of engagement enough?

[90] **Ms Thomas:** No, absolutely not.

[91] **William Graham:** Jessica, would you like to comment on that?

[92] **Ms Blair:** Yes. I fully agree with that. I finished my Master's degree in 2012 and was unemployed for a period of six months. I kept having interviews but could not really get anywhere. I went on a 13-week placement to Brussels, where I worked for regional government in lifelong learning. So, I got to do a lot of research into European institutions, developed really good networks and learned how to work in a proper environment. I came back on a Friday and, on the following Monday, I had a job interview here at the Assembly, and was employed.

[93] **Ms Thomas:** What are you doing now?

[94] **Ms Blair:** As a result of that, I am working as a policy analyst for the Institute of Welsh Affairs, where I look at a broad range of policies, including European policy.

[95] **William Graham:** Keith, do you want to ask about barriers to participation?

[96] **Keith Davies:** Yes, I have a question for ColegauCymru. In your paper, you talk about the drop in funding from Erasmus+. How will that affect programmes?

[97] **Dr Walker:** We will try to work through that. It is a potential barrier, but I do not believe that it is an insurmountable one in terms of stopping us from engaging with Erasmus+. There is a reduction in some of the fee that we would receive, but we will not let that stop our learners from potentially accessing these very valuable programmes. That applies right across the board, not just to Wales, colleges, or ColegauCymru; it is a Europe-wide determination that has been made and it is pretty much set now for the foreseeable

period. As I said, it is not insurmountable and we can work through that, it is just a barrier compared with what the Leonardo programme had been. So, there is no reason why we should not expect to see an increase in uptake in mobility in the colleges.

[98] We have been doing some work with the British Council, working with college leaders, including Sharron Lusher, to talk about their priorities for international and European engagement, and to talk about strategic priorities for the college sector in the future. One thing that has come out quite strongly in the draft report that we have received from that is that principals and deputy principals of colleges cite European mobility programmes as being one of their priorities for international engagement. That has not been suggested to them, it is something that has come directly from them.

[99] Sharron, your students have engaged in that programme.

[100] **Ms Lusher:** Yes, our students have engaged in the programme, and will continue to do so. As a college, not only do we participate in the programmes that have already been referred to, in terms of the lifelong learning programmes, but we have experience of INTERREG, which is a very different programme in that it is not about students going abroad to gain work experience for specific periods of time, but is about co-operation, which is transnational. That probably goes back to one of the first sets of questions that was asked about why these programmes are different, or perhaps whether these programmes are different, from mainstream European funds. I believe that they are different, because they allow you, as an educator, to put together a programme of support that includes, for example, innovation, research and delivery, supported by a strong intervention rate, which is also important. Secondly, all the programmes are different because they are about partnership working, in that in each of the projects, particularly from an INTERREG point of view, there is an expectation that you will work with partners to deliver certain elements of the programme. That has resulted in sustainable partnerships that, again, help students from an international perspective. So, yes, we fully engage with it.

[101] **Keith Davies:** To follow that up, are there any challenges in getting students involved? Are they students from a particular discipline? Do some disciplines respond much better than others?

[102] **Dr Walker:** Generically, there are three general barriers to learners not wanting to take up opportunities. One is the linguistic barrier in the sense that there may be some level of fear of going overseas and not being able to communicate. Colleges do a language induction course for the country that they are going to, but it is not an in-depth programme that would allow students to be anything like fluent before they go on their exchange. The second barrier is probably people's horizons. Some learners are not used to travelling abroad or have not had that as part of their upbringing, and perhaps they feel deterred from taking up opportunities abroad. The third point is about the practicalities of whether they can fit it in with their learning scheme or their family circumstances. Every individual will have their own experience of that, and their own issues that they would have to undertake. Those are the three barriers that I would highlight.

[103] However, as Sharron said, those who go on to do it find that it broadens their horizons, enriches their soft skills and has a positive impact.

[104] **Keith Davies:** What about disciplines?

[105] **Dr Walker:** I would not say that there were one or two disciplines that take up the opportunities much more than others; I am not aware of a particular bias or non-bias in favour of particular discipline areas. The colleges have a very broad range of discipline offer, and there is quite a wide range of disciplinary areas where you can take up mobility and lifelong

learning programmes—it is not restricted to a narrow field of subject areas.

[106] **Keith Davies:** I remember a college—it might have been Coleg Llandrillo—taking motor vehicle students with staff out to production companies in north Italy, and I thought that that was great. I just wondered whether a lot of that is going on, because taking the students together away gets away from that second barrier that you were talking about—if they do not want to go on their own—and they get that experience out in a production company in northern Italy. I thought that that was great.

[107] **Dr Walker:** Just in case it is not clear from our evidence, these are practical—. They are engaged in not only studying abroad, but often in placements in workplaces. These are very valuable and varied experiences for the learners.

[108] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning, all. I want to look at ColegauCymru's strategic commitment and leadership; we have talked about lots of other things, so I would like to tease some of that out. I would like to clarify the role that is played by you in supporting engagement in the EU education and training mobility programmes, which you have talked about. If we get underneath that, what level of resource do you commit to that type of activity, and what sort of support do you provide in the project cycle by issuing any information or advice?

[109] **Dr Walker:** Effectively, we employ an international co-ordinator in ColegauCymru, who will be the clearing house or the receiving house for a lot of the information through the national agencies, Ecorys and the British Council where relevant. The international co-ordinator works directly with the college leads in that area to make sure that all the relevant information is disseminated so that there is plenty of time to prepare and get everything set for quite a demanding application process. One is, in fact, coming up next week. Next week is a key deadline for us in terms of getting in some of the applications.

10:15

[110] We then offer help as a hub of expertise in terms of writing, helping to structure and write bids for those colleges that want to make their own application to the lifelong learning programme. The colleges themselves also put in their own application; it is not just ColegauCymru. So, we act as a hub of expertise there, if you like. We work together. Wales is a relatively small country and everybody knows each other in this area, so we work quite closely with the colleges to make sure that if they have any difficulties or problems, they are addressed, and we can act as a source of expertise there.

[111] **Joyce Watson:** Do you help, for example, to identify partners?

[112] **Dr Walker:** This is more of an issue in INTERREG, the north Atlantic programmes and the Ireland-Wales programmes. That is where, I think, there is a greater challenge in terms of identifying partners. In order to access those funding streams, you need to have a multinational alliance of colleges and technology institutes across a relatively broad range of European countries. I think that it is fair to say that that is the real challenge that we are facing, namely to try to make sure that we network colleges with institutes of technology in Ireland and other equivalent vocational and education training providers across the EU. That is a more challenging task, I think. We are trying to do our best to work with our equivalent associations in Scotland, Ireland and so on, but I think that, Sharron, you probably have experience of trying to build those multinational partnerships through INTERREG.

[113] **Ms Lusher:** Yes, we do. This is one of the challenges, perhaps, that we face. If I may make two points, the first being that, from a ColegauCymru support point of view, ColegauCymru runs a network of European managers, all of whom meet together on a regular

basis to share information, best practice and procedures and protocols, which is very important, so it does not mean that colleges have to reinvent the wheel every time that they look at new European funding. That is an important point, I think, from a support perspective.

[114] The second point that I would make is about partnerships and how you develop those partnerships. As a college, we have run two INTERREG projects over the last few years that have been successful, with funds totalling just over €4 million. Both projects have been centred on social inclusion and trying to engage people—people who may have been previously unemployed—back with the workforce through training or through mobile technology. One of the biggest difficulties that we have in those sorts of projects is trying to find international partners. As a publicly funded body, it is important for us that we build up trust in our partners and that we go through a period of due diligence so that we know that we can work with a partner from a financial point of view. It is about making those partnerships and sustaining them, not only during the lifetime of the project, to realise the full benefits of the project latterly. It is then about making sure that you can sustain those partnerships after the projects, which is what we do, and you get benefits there, in terms of community regeneration particularly. However, I think that one of the things that Colegau Cymru and we have discussed is this brokerage-type function where we can work together to try to find partners that are willing to work with us as public bodies, but are also in a position to be able to do that. As I say, that is one of the biggest challenges that we have.

[115] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** We have heard about how you engage in Wales with European affairs and about your international co-ordinator and the networks that you have in Wales. The sector does not have a presence in Brussels in Wales House. How much does that hold you back?

[116] **Dr Walker:** There are two points there. I think that the way that the European lifelong programmes are administered is through the national agencies Ecorys and the British Council so I think that in much of what we are talking about that would be covered. In other words, there is not a direct Brussels dimension to that. What I mentioned a few minutes ago, however, about the central funds for Erasmus+—the centrally administered funds that come from Brussels—there might be some benefit to having some closer relationship directly with the Commission. I think that it would be worth exploring how we might have more effective links directly into Brussels. It is something that we have not accessed before in terms of the centrally administered funds—a number of other organisations have not accessed them either—but there are substantial funding opportunities available, so I think that that is a path down which we are likely to go in some respect.

[117] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** Things have developed over the years—we were talking about this earlier this morning—through osmosis, in a way, and institutions have developed over time. Is it an anomaly that HE is there and FE is not?

[118] **Dr Walker:** I think that it is slightly different in the sense that, for the HE sector, there is very substantial funding through the framework programme, now Horizon 2020, and billions of pounds of funding that comes directly from, and is administered from, Brussels, through the European Research Council and so on. That is not the case to anything like the same degree with colleges, because the European lifelong learning programmes for colleges come, as I said, through the national agency, Ecorys. So, there is not a direct analogy there. However, I think that in trying to access the central funds on skills, for instance, that there would be an argument for us engaging more directly with Brussels and that is what we are trying to do at the moment. Whether we do that through a direct presence in Tŷ Cymru remains to be seen, but it is certainly an option of some description. We would have to be able to put a business case forward to make that justifiable.

[119] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** Are there any other thoughts from anyone else?

[120] **Ms Lusher:** If I may, Chair, we have not seen it as a barrier to any great extent at this point because we have engaged fully, not only in INTERREG and mobility projects, but in other European funds as well. I think that it would have to be a case of assessing what the additional benefit would be regarding such an investment.

[121] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** How do your direct links with Brussels work at the moment? Is it just through ad hoc visits and so on?

[122] **Dr Walker:** It is generally through the national agencies, Ecorys and the British Council, and we obviously go to Brussels for events and programmes that are put in. It is a slightly different area, but there are some programmes relating to credit frameworks and qualifications that we administer for the Welsh Government as a national contact point, so we are regularly in Brussels through our employees attending conferences there and other work streams. They tend to be on the slightly broader area of credit frameworks and qualifications frameworks, like the European qualifications framework and the European credit system for vocational education and training, which I think we mentioned in our paper. It is something that I think that we should explore further, but, again, we would have to demonstrate value for money for any particular institutional arrangement.

[123] **William Graham:** Mick, you have a supplementary question on this point.

[124] **Mick Antoniw:** Yes. You said earlier that you do not think that we are maximising the potential benefits from this. It does seem to me that you are rather taking a back seat role in this, although the amounts are relative in terms of HE and so on. Would you say that it is fair that, at the moment, we are not maximising our potential in terms of accessing the funds and resources that are available and that a more direct and more strategic role in Brussels—perhaps as part of a broader team within Brussels—might raise the game for Wales?

[125] **Dr Walker:** From the college sector's perspective, I would say that we are on a journey and that the journey has quite a steep positive curve that we have demonstrated in the evidence. The journey, I think, will continue in terms of increasing the engagement in these programmes. We are taking a strategic view and a strategic approach through our central functions in Colegau Cymru. I think, on accessing more of the central funding, that is something that we are going to have to consider quite carefully in the coming period. We would want to consider a range of options on that, and it may be that more network working would be a better option than having a presence in Tŷ Cymru. We would be open to discussions on that and we certainly would not have a closed mind on it. On the basic question of whether we are maximising opportunities, no, we are not at the moment. We can do far more. We should do far more. We are on that journey to deliver more, but, absolutely, there is no question about it that the UK generally, including Wales, is not accessing the EU lifelong learning programmes as it should and as it could.

[126] **Mick Antoniw:** Is the Welsh Government giving sufficient strategic leadership in this area?

[127] **Dr Walker:** The Welsh Government has a strong policy to engage in European lifelong learning programmes. We work closely with it and we have positive relationships with it. Perhaps a one-stop shop or a single point of contact in the Welsh Government on lifelong learning programmes would be helpful from our perspective. However, I do not think that that is a deal breaker. I do not think that it is causing huge problems that there is not one at the moment, but I think that it would help to oil the wheels, if you like, in terms of smoothness; so, maybe some sort of central officer—a single officer—would be positive. I do not know what Sharron would think about that, but that would be one suggestion.

[128] **Keith Davies:** You have appointed a national co-ordinator and you are not the only witness to tell us that there is no single contact point in Wales for people who want to talk about the EU funding opportunities.

[129] **Dr Walker:** There is a question about being fit for purpose in the sense that the Welsh Government does not administer any of the funds. Although it can play a role in helping to co-ordinate, it is the national agency that runs the programmes. The Welsh Government is not a direct participant in that. What we are talking about here is just a matter of administrative working, rather than an absolutely missing block in the arrangements.

[130] **Ms Lusher:** Perhaps I might add to that and support the one-stop shop type of process or the brokerage point that I referred to earlier. On the INTERREG programmes, and the mobility programmes in particular, although INTERREG is not administered here, it is very important that the INTERREG programmes form a coherent part of any Welsh Government strategy for European funding generally: that they are not seen as a separate part of it; and that there should be an identification of areas where INTERREG can contribute fully to Welsh Government policy and where there are those synergies with Welsh Government policy. So, I think that something needs to be done there. The second part will come back to the brokerage part. I think that, with sustaining partnerships, there could be an opportunity for the next round of programmes to have more involvement and more dissemination of information through events and communication to try to engage more organisations within the INTERREG programme in particular.

[131] **William Graham:** Thank you. Joyce, can we go back to your question on Erasmus?

[132] **Joyce Watson:** Julie is going to do it.

[133] **Julie James:** No, you do it, Joyce.

[134] **Joyce Watson:** Okay. I will not argue about that. We are interested in the point that Erasmus+ introduces a new initiative, and it gives support to develop knowledge sector alliances, bringing together the educational and business sectors, which is all good stuff. Are any of you planning to participate in that knowledge sector alliance?

[135] **Dr Walker:** Yes. Those are the centrally administered funds, the new strands of Erasmus+ that are run directly from the Commission that we have been referring to for the past few minutes. That is where I think that there are some new opportunities to engage directly with multinational partners to ensure that we can get projects that really add value for the partners. I think that we have to make sure that the projects are worth while up front, rather than just working to access the money for the sake of it. I think that we need to ensure that we have a project that will really add value for all the partners. That is why we have been meeting with the Irish institutes of technology, Scotland and other colleagues across the UK and elsewhere to try to think about where some of these knowledge alliances and skills alliances can be forged. The timescale on that is a bit different to the lifelong learning programmes. We have an opportunity to think in the next two or three months about how they could be configured with a view to, later in the year, putting together some international alliances in this area. I think that it is quite exciting. It is quite an exciting opportunity and we are very interested in participating and meeting in 10 days' time in Glasgow to try to work out what those opportunities may be in more concrete terms.

10:30

[136] **William Graham:** Thank you. Could we move on now, please, in view of the time? Dafydd, could you move on to question 18, perhaps?

[137] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Yes. I want to say to Sharon Thomas how delighted I was, as someone who was involved with ECTARC when it was established, at this tremendous role you now have with the higher education sector, with Erasmus+.

[138] **Ms Thomas:** Thank you.

[139] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** I just want to confirm that this application will include support from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales for the co-funding of some of these programmes—that that is how it operates. You are now more directly funded by HEFCW than you were, are you not?

[140] **Ms Thomas:** Well, we were until now. Now, that funding has been cut. That is the problem. We have received co-funding for the last three years, and now it has said that there is no more. That is our predicament. Although I will be putting a bid in on Friday to send 200 recent graduates a year to Europe, we will not be able to go ahead unless we manage to find the co-funding. You mentioned earlier about having a central contact point in the Welsh Government. It has been difficult for an organisation like ours to find the right route and who to speak to about it because it is higher education, but it is also careers and people in the labour market. The target group that we work with is very cross-cutting. I have had to go through our local AM and the Deputy Minister to find a route to get to speak to the right people in the Welsh Government to say, ‘How can we get co-funding for this project?’ There is a need; we have demonstrated the need. We have 350 applications currently. Those are on the increase. How are we going to support these people? The European funding is there, but without a small amount of co-funding from Wales or another source of European funding, it will not continue.

[141] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** We can help you there—.

[142] **Ms Thomas:** Yes.

[143] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** With colleagues, Chair, we can make a recommendation from this committee.

[144] **Ms Thomas:** Could you?

[145] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Of course we can.

[146] **Ms Thomas:** That would be really helpful.

[147] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Clearly, this is the main area of study. I was also struck by—we have two Sharons this morning—your reference to the need for INTERREG and other European programmes to work together more in relation to the mainstream. This, of course, is the approach of the Commission. So, we need to make sure that we are up with that. If there are recommendations we can make, again there—. It points to greater collaboration between higher education and the vocational education and training sector in Wales generally in European programmes. In one sense, one could argue that that sector is better organised in co-operating than universities. I think I am allowed to say that. Greg, would you like to take that up?

[148] **Dr Walker:** The slight issue with the co-operation between the vocational education and training strand and the higher education strand is that, as you may guess, they are separately funded with different criteria and different managing agencies in the UK—Ecorys for VET and the British Council now for Erasmus+ relating to higher education. We have had meetings with the British Council to try to work out ways in which the synergies, the links, can be made, but it is not easy, I think that it is fair to say. They are very separate strands of

funding. Sharon Thomas and I have had some initial discussions about the extent to which higher education learners leaving FE colleges could potentially access the work that ECTARC does. That could work. There are level 4 plus students coming out with higher education qualifications who are not currently accessing ECTARC programmes or one of its programmes. That is one possible way we could co-operate.

[149] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Surely, as the foundation degrees are increasing within the FE VET sector, that will qualify them to take part in the other programmes.

[150] **Ms Thomas:** Yes.

[151] **Dr Walker:** It would. The challenge then might be that most of our higher education learners in colleges are part-time learners, so most of them will have jobs—full-time jobs in many cases. About 80% of those on higher education courses in colleges are in jobs. So, to be able to take 13 weeks off, which is the model that ECTARC runs, is a bit of a challenge, but it is not impossible.

[152] **Ms Thomas:** It does not have to be 13 weeks, however. We could apply for funding for six weeks or eight weeks.

[153] **Dr Walker:** I think that demonstrating the value of that to employers would be very possible.

[154] **William Graham:** Thank you very much. We are almost at the end of our session now, but I would like to ask each of you whether you have any specific recommendations regarding action that can be taken to optimise the programme for 2014-20, bearing in mind that we have a very short amount of time. Sharron, I will ask you to lead on that. Do you have any suggestions?

[155] **Ms Lusher:** My key point would be about opportunities within the Welsh Government for brokerage and for facilitating further discussion on partnership. So, having a single point of contact.

[156] **Dr Walker:** Recommendations can also be made to us as a sector to challenge us on the strategic role that we are playing and to give some positive pointers about how we can engage more centrally with the centrally run programmes within the Commission. I welcome the points that have been made this morning suggesting closer links with Brussels. That would be very welcome from our perspective.

[157] **Ms Blair:** May I very briefly mention our perspective as an employer? We are a very small charity that has five full-time members of staff. I started a Leonardo placement programme in our organisation, for which we had 13-week placements, and we found it hugely valuable as an employer.

[158] **Ms Thomas:** It is interesting to see it from the opposite perspective.

[159] **William Graham:** Do you have anything to add from your point of view?

[160] **Ms Thomas:** Yes, I would like to see a single contact point in the Welsh Government: people who we can talk to about our programme, our concerns, our progress, development and where we go from here. At the moment, we do not feel that we have that support. A big concern for us is co-funding; any help with that would be very much appreciated.

[161] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** I cannot imagine that no-one in that lovely building in

Llandudno Junction would see you.

[162] **Ms Thomas:** I have a meeting there next week.

[163] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Good.

[164] **Ms Thomas:** It was difficult to arrange, however.

[165] **William Graham:** I thank the witnesses for the way in which they have answered our questions today and for their evidence. As you know, you will have the opportunity to check the transcript of today's evidence in due course. Thank you very much for your attendance today.

[166] I ask committee members to reconvene at 10.55 a.m.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:37 a 10:53.
The meeting adjourned between 10:37 and 10:53.*

Ymchwiliad i Gyfleoedd Cyllido yr UE 2014-20 (Sesiwn 3) Inquiry into EU Funding Opportunities 2014-20 (Session 3)

[167] **William Graham:** I welcome our witnesses. For the record, would you mind giving your names and titles? We will then go straight into questions.

[168] **Ms Wales:** I am Helen Wales, director of UNA Exchange.

[169] **Mr Stewart:** I am Simon Stewart, representing Connect Cymru here today. I am also a senior lecturer at Glyndŵr University in youth and community work.

[170] **William Graham:** Thank you. I will start with the first question on the importance of participation, namely the strategic importance given to volunteering and youth mobility actions within Wales by Welsh Government, local authorities, educational bodies and local businesses. Do you think that a higher priority could be given to this? Are there any examples in other EU countries of such good practice?

[171] **Ms Wales:** From our experience, the Youth in Action programme is a fantastic vehicle for bringing opportunities for participation to young people in Wales who would not, perhaps, normally be able to access the opportunities that are offered through the vocational education and the higher education streams. In terms of the work that we have done at UNA Exchange we have been involved in Youth in Action and its forerunner, Youth for Europe, since the programmes began, and since 2008 we have had a really strong focus in our work on youth participation, particularly in the EVS programme, and engaging young people from across Wales who are from backgrounds that would not normally have access to international travel, perhaps, and would not volunteer. We had support from Welsh Government funding to be able to do this. The GwirVol international grant has been fundamental in allowing us to access Youth in Action funding to create volunteering opportunities where young people can participate, and we see a knock-on effect through our work in terms of community engagement when people return to Wales, in terms of increased motivation and aspiration. I think that we feel very strongly that more could be done in Wales to encourage participation. Do you want to say something, Simon?

[172] **Mr Stewart:** Just on the Connect Cymru perspective in terms of youth exchange and participation in that, I would say that, through the Erasmus+ funding, young people in Wales make an active contribution to their own participation through the establishment of the

bilateral or trilateral exchange programmes. So, there is great benefit, I suppose, in terms of skills development and knowledge gained from that process. In terms of whether Wales could do more or where there is good practice elsewhere, perhaps there is a follow on question. Certainly, Connect Cymru would link with the Youth Council for Northern Ireland, YouthLink Scotland and National Youth Agency in England, and support—up until Friday—the work of the British Council in distributing European funding for young people’s work.

[173] In terms of what we could do more of, we have seen that groups, such as that in Northern Ireland, which is very well-organised strategically in this area, seem to be able to draw down, or there are groups within the country that seem to be better organised to draw down, significant amounts of funding that other nations do not draw down. So, for example, if we were working on something like the Barnett formula, Northern Ireland probably brings in somewhere in the region of three to four times the amount of funding that it would probably be allocated otherwise. In Wales, Connect Cymru has been well-organised from around 2011. We have seen something in the region of €1.5 million brought into Wales. I think that we are of a mind, from the Connect Cymru committee, that we could potentially see that money double or treble, should there be more core strategic funding for the organisation of groupings within Wales. Between 2007 and 2011, Wales received somewhere in the region of €2 million, which was prior to Connect Cymru having the remit, as a body or organisation, to promote international work within Wales. Following its active engagement as a programme in the final two years of funding, 2012 and 2013, that funding had increased to approximately €680,000 in 2012 and €980,000 in 2013. So, they are significant increases, and that is essentially from a voluntary sector grouping or a grouping made up of voluntary statutory sector agencies that comes together as a voluntary grouping with a small grant of £12,500 and tries to co-ordinate that. The Youth Council for Northern Ireland, on the other hand, has two full-time members of staff employed to do this, and the groups benefit significantly from that strategic organisation, essentially. I do not know whether that answers the question.

[174] **William Graham:** Yes, thank you. I now call Julie James.

[175] **Julie James:** You started to talk a little bit about the sorts of young people who are benefiting from both programmes. I wonder whether you would elaborate on that. Also, you say a little bit in your paper about what could be done to broaden that. I would like to hear a little bit more about that as well, please.

[176] **Ms Wales:** If I can, I will talk about UNA Exchange’s experiences. As with some of the other European programmes, there is an assumption or prejudice that it is often people who are already engaged in the idea of travelling or going overseas—people who come from backgrounds where people already have that mindset—who take advantage of the European voluntary opportunities, particularly through the European Voluntary Service. In 2008, we started a programme called Step by Step to create opportunities to really engage with young people in Wales who were potentially not in full-time education, not in employment and not from those communities or families where the idea of engaging in your community, engaging globally, travelling and having a global outlook are normal, so to speak.

11:00

[177] So, the way we did this—and this is linked to some of the points Simon was making about the need for strategic networks and sharing experience—was to draw down funding—. For example, in 2013, with our match funding from GwirVol, through the international grant, we accessed more than £40,000 in Youth in Action funding to create short-term international volunteering experiences for young people from Wales at risk of exclusion. There were people from a wide range of backgrounds across, I think, eight local authorities last year. Some of them were living with issues around homelessness, some of them had health and disability issues, and some people had a substance abuse history, but the thing they shared

was that they needed additional support and additional encouragement to take advantage of the Youth in Action opportunities.

[178] The way we work is something that could be adopted, adapted and extended with the further support of a network such as Connect Cymru to spread it to other organisations. We have expertise in international volunteering and working in the youth programmes, so we draw down the funding and then we work in partnership with organisations across Wales. We work with Communities First organisations, statutory sector youth organisations and, in particular, voluntary sector youth organisations, housing associations—all of these organisations that are engaging on the front line with young people—and we work in partnership with youth workers and support workers from those organisations to bring those young people into those opportunities. So, they have support from their on-the-ground contact person—the person they see on a regular basis—and then they have further training, support, evaluation and follow-up with an organisation like UNA Exchange. I think that is a really important point to make if we are talking about encouraging wider participation in European programmes. If we are going to do it well, we need to be investing in longer term support mechanisms and seeing this as part of an ongoing programme of youth work, really, so that European opportunities have a role to play within a wider youth work offer.

[179] **Mr Stewart:** To answer your question, Julie, I think I would make three points. First, the type of young person who benefits is very much dependent on the support. For those who have support and feel confident enough to participate on the basis of support from home, it is absolutely fine. Others do not have that support from home and potentially need a mentor figure or a lead worker figure who supports them in that. I will give you two examples. We held a conference in Glyndŵr University last year on European youth funding issues and two young people spoke at that conference very eloquently. One was a Cambridge graduate who had utilised a volunteering opportunity to develop her French skills. The other was a young man who is interested in environmental issues and has used volunteering opportunities to develop his vocational skills set and his vocational base. Both are highly active in their local communities as a result of this. The third point to make is that, on the basis of carrying out this type of work before, if we are talking about groups of young people within society who have fewer opportunities, it is very much about the fact that, what you cannot comprehend, you will be unaware of. So, it is very dependent upon the informal education structures, which, to my mind, are youth services and youth work, to engage with those young people and use a skill set that enables them to avail themselves of this type of opportunity. However, there may be a barrier to that in some instances, which is the training of those professionals and whether they can comprehend the value inherent within international opportunities.

[180] **Julie James:** Are you connected in any way to any of the other social programmes, such as Communities First or Families First? Are there cross-referrals between your programme and theirs, or are they just completely separate?

[181] **Ms Wales:** I can talk about how UNA Exchange works, as an example. We work through informal partnerships with organisations such as those that you referred to, but I would like to reinforce Simon's point that, if the people who are working with young people are not aware of the value of these opportunities and are not aware of how to access them, it makes it much harder for our organisations, and for people like Simon and me who have that expertise, to reach those young people, because the way in which you reach young people is through the youth workers and the professionals who work with them, a lot of the time.

[182] **Mr Stewart:** I would suggest that the groupings who are members on the Connect Cymru committee would be connected to those groupings at a local level. I would not know how strategically linked they are, Julie.

[183] **Mick Antoniw:** You have given us a bit of evidence about why we are doing all of

this and the potential benefits; I would like to ask you a couple of questions about how we evaluate that. However, just to get a better understanding of what you are doing, can you explain to me what your relationship is with the British Council and how that operates strategically? Could you also give an example of what you would say are some of the success stories that have emerged from your project work?

[184] **Mr Stewart:** I will come back to how we achieve value out of it and deal with that last. The question about the relationship with the British Council is an interesting one, as Connect Cymru was informed on Friday that the British Council no longer wanted to partner with it as an information provider in Wales. For me, there are a number of concerns there. It is potentially a threat to the autonomy of devolved administrations in terms of how they want this European funding to be best utilised within a national setting. The relationship until that point, until the new Erasmus+ funding, had been fine. It is not just Connect Cymru that was told that it is no longer to remain an information provider, as YouthLink Scotland and the National Youth Agency have also been told something similar.

[185] The funding arrangements for Northern Ireland are slightly different, as in Wales, which maybe gives us a little bit of protection, but I think it is for committee members to work with Assembly Members to ensure that that protection remains. Northern Ireland is funded through the Department of Education Northern Ireland and therefore is in a stronger negotiating position when it deals with the national agency, which is the British Council. In Wales, the £12,500 that goes to the Connect Cymru grouping comes through the international education partnership and will continue until 2015, I believe. So, the question in terms of our relationship with the British Council is a timely question, but I think, in terms of representing the interests of the young people of Wales, the Connect Cymru grouping, having been established in 1994, not only has the expertise to lead strategically on this, but is connected to every corner of Wales in terms of the organisations that are represented on its committee.

[186] So, I would suggest that it is a highly efficient tool—in terms of your question about value—with regard to being able to support and distribute information to Welsh communities and to understand the needs of Welsh communities in order to gain greatest advantage from the funding that Europe presents, really. As an example of a success story, I will point to a contact-making seminar in Brittany last October or November, where we looked at some of the examples of intercultural practice and the learning that the French undertook through the French-German youth office. Again, the French were very well organised. They had 11 regional sub-groupings of the French youth office itself, and that sub-grouping was tasked, essentially, with organising somewhere in the region of 10 of these contact-making seminars each year. That not only brought benefits in terms of professional links, professional development links, opportunities for youth exchange programmes, opportunities for intercultural and linguistic animation learning, but it also provided an opportunity for the regional area to bring substantial amounts of money into that area, which had wider economic benefits to that area. So, I would suggest, for example, training conferences. Something that we are currently looking at in Glyndŵr University is a degree route in international youth work, supported by a centre of excellence structure that would potentially see us develop opportunities locally in the grass-roots community that local people could take advantage of in terms of European opportunity, but likewise would be a training hub. As a training hub, becoming a flagship, essentially, for the likes of Wales, it then has the potential to bring in large training conferences, training programmes, summer activities et cetera that just would not be there before, and, with that, the associated benefits to the wider community.

[187] **Mick Antoni:** Could I just pursue that a little bit, Chair, because it is in the element? In terms of the implications of the British Council decision, I am trying to get an understanding of precisely what it has decided. It may be, Chair, just flag it up now, that we probably do need evidence from it on that specifically.

[188] **William Graham:** [*Inaudible.*—is coming in to give evidence.

[189] **Mick Antoniwi:** Yes. So, in terms of the actual precise mention of what it has done, and the impact of it, because you talked about it disenfranchising us, effectively, in terms of some of the work that you are doing, I just want to try to get a slightly better understanding of the impact. Perhaps you could clarify that a bit for me.

[190] **Mr Stewart:** The Welsh Assembly, through the information education programme, essentially provides some funding to Connect Cymru in order for it to be an information provider for Wales. Under the new Erasmus+ structures, the British Council has decided that it wants a one-size-fits-all approach—a level playing field, as it is called—that enables—. There may be reasons, but those reasons have not been shared with us, as such. It has really been a verbal exchange last Friday. We have asked why it is seeking to terminate this arrangement. As yet, we really have no firm criteria or justification for that. It potentially wastes the expertise of that particular panel. The questions that arise from that are: who will carry out that work, or the expertise of that grouping, in place of that grouping, and how has it arrived at that decision? We would possibly request that that is confirmed in writing to us also. Does that—

[191] **Mick Antoniwi:** I think that you have taken that as far as it is fair to ask you to do so. In terms of the actual specific benefits from the work, do you have an analysis that you can give us as an example, such as, ‘This is really what we think the consequence of what we are doing is; this is what we are achieving for young people in particular’?

[192] **Mr Stewart:** We do not, and that is possibly due to the evidence base being lacking in this area. Traditionally, your services have not been the best-funded services, but also, they have not, I suppose, gone after this evidence base. I think that the strength of the new youth work strategy is that it talks about strengthening that evidence base. I suppose I can talk from my own experiences. I am currently undertaking a doctorate in this area, and I am looking at the understanding that youth work practitioners within Wales have of this area of work and how that strengthens their resolve to participate in this area, broadens their awareness and understanding that local issues can be dealt with through European-based programmes, whether that be in skills acquisition or problem solving through being landed in a different culture and having to deal with the impact of that culture shock and participate within the locality. So, I think that there is anecdotal evidence, but nothing that I would add in terms of hard evidence.

11:15

[193] **William Graham:** Rhun ap Iorwerth, is it on this point?

[194] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** Yes, it was just on the relationship with the British Council and asking for your comments on something that was given to the committee as part of a written submission. This organisation said

[195] ‘We have referred small organizations to Connect Cymru in the past who have only referred them to the British Council website. This is not good enough!’

[196] What is your response to that?

[197] **Mr Stewart:** I suppose that I would have to ask the Connect Cymru committee more broadly, but, certainly, my own experience is that, for example, we organised a conference in both north and south Wales last year and we had somewhere in the region of 80 people in attendance in the north Wales one. I would have personally sat down with somewhere in the region of 30 individuals in terms of advising them on their applications, on the content and

how they structure it, the objectives of the programme and, therefore, what they should be looking to achieve within that application. Boys and Girls Clubs of Wales has a dedicated phone line—no, it is the contact organisation for Wales and, therefore, information that would be sought through the British Council or the Connect Cymru websites would go straight back to Boys and Girls Clubs of Wales—

[198] **William Graham:** Simon, I am keen to move on; we have another two questions. Keith, would you like to come in, please?

[199] **Keith Davies:** Thank you, Chair. We know what is happening with local government at the moment, with cutbacks in every authority in Wales. It is, on average, a 5% cutback, and, obviously, things like leisure services, youth services and cultural services will be cut back. However, at the same time, in your paper you say that

[200] ‘The Youth strand of Erasmus + will receive a 70% increase in funds for 2014-2020’.

[201] What are the challenges now with youth services probably being cut and this possibility of having this huge increase in funding?

[202] **Mr Stewart:** I think that that is an excellent question to ask, because the pot of funding has had a 70% increase from its predecessor programme, which was the Youth in Action programme. Ten per cent of this entire programme, which is €14.7 billion, I think, is set aside for the youth chapter within that. So, really, you are looking towards organisations that have the capacity to organise youth exchange practices to be the ones to deliver on this. However, there is another dimension to this, and I think that that is maybe what Helen alluded to before, which is about the understanding that international youth work is not about a cultural jolly. It is not about a holiday, and it is not about cultural tourism. It is about an educational process that takes account of a variety of skills and knowledge bases that a young person actively participates in. So, targets or outcomes that are demanded of local authority services and voluntary services alike can potentially be met through the utilisation of European funding in this way. Yes, there will be a struggle, but, I think, used strategically and wisely—and that is about how well-informed people are—it could potentially supplement some of those cuts.

[203] **Ms Wales:** I think that, to add to that, there is a massive potential for Wales to make a lot more use of this 70% increase. From our experiences with people who have been able to access that, we absolutely cannot do it without additional funding. We really welcome that the national voluntary youth organisations grants have moved back to core funding to support voluntary youth work organisations. From our point of view, that means that we have more of a chance of being able to draw down this match funding and deliver these opportunities to young people. Again, it reinforces the need for networks to share expertise and help organisations with severely reduced capacity who are struggling to deliver, even in youth services, their front-line work and to help them make sense of what is for a lot of people a very bureaucratic and time-consuming process to access this funding. We have expertise in Wales through organisations like the UNA Exchange and networks like Connect Cymru; the challenge is to maximise that expertise to enable Wales to make the most of this funding opportunity.

[204] **William Graham:** We are almost out of time on this. The last question is from Joyce Watson.

[205] **Joyce Watson:** Finally, is there anything that you want to raise, or any other points that we have not covered that you think will be of particular interest and help inform our inquiry? We are very short on time now.

[206] **Mr Stewart:** From my perspective, there are two points. One is that, since Connect Cymru had the small grant from the international education programme, funding has increased from €650,000 to about €950,000 per year. With core funding, there is no reason why that could not be €2 million per year, which would have a significant impact in the informal education sector. I am not talking about a large amount of funding there at all. I think it would also potentially answer the question that was asked previously, which was about some criticisms of the British Council. Connect Cymru is very much dependent upon people's goodwill. They are not paid to do that; they volunteer to be on that committee, and therefore, have full-time day jobs of their own. So, with that core strategic funding, that potentially frees up, or de-risks—which is maybe a better way to look at it—the threat to the disbandment of such a grouping because key individuals are absolutely essential to its running. If those key individuals either retire or are made redundant, or find employment elsewhere and do not have a sympathetic employer who allows them to attend those meetings, then the integrity of that grouping, potentially, is at risk.

[207] Lastly, it is about holding to account the national agency so that Wales gets its fair share here. There may be something there regarding the individuals who sit at meetings, with the managing authority and national agency collaborating with somebody like Connect Cymru in order to ensure that the national agency is being held to account from both the political perspective and from a grass-roots perspective.

[208] **Ms Wales:** I think that my key points have been made. I will just reinforce one thing that we have not touched upon so much, which is not just the link to the youth work agenda in Wales, but the volunteering and the citizen engagement agenda that we have. The European Voluntary Service in particular allows us some really exciting possibilities to use volunteering to increase capacity in Welsh organisations and of young people going overseas. So, we need to make sure that we are looking to use that opportunity, too.

[209] **William Graham:** Thank you both very much for engaging with the committee today. There will be a transcript of today's evidence session, which will be sent to you in the next couple of days. Thank you very much for your attendance.

11:25

Ymchwiliad i Gyfleodd Cyllido yr UE 2014-2020 (Sesiwn 4) Inquiry into EU Funding Opportunities 2014-2020 (Session 4)

[210] **William Graham:** Good morning and welcome to this committee session. We will go straight to questions. Please give us your names and titles for the record.

[211] **Ms Morgan:** I am Helen Morgan. I am the senior manager for the west Wales European centre with Carmarthenshire County Council.

[212] **Mr Compagni:** I am Filippo Compagni. I am the European policy and external funding manager for Powys County Council. I am also a European adviser to the Welsh Local Government Association.

[213] **Ms Burchell:** I am Barbara Burchell. I am the principal European officer in Conwy County Borough Council.

[214] **William Graham:** Thank you very much. I will ask the first question, if I may. Can you clarify the extent of the involvement of your various authorities in EU programmes during the period of 2007 to 2013, including in particular INTERREG and Erasmus+, and the level of priority that was given to those?

[215] **Ms Morgan:** I will start for Carmarthenshire County Council. We have been heavily involved with European funding in the last programme period. We have an investment portfolio of about £150 million. That has been primarily through convergence funding and the rural development plan. The bulk of our work is to secure structural funds on a strategic basis in line with our strategic policies. With transnational working, it has been less because of the capacity and resources required in order to fulfil the requirements of the structural funds.

[216] **Mr Compagni:** Powys County Council has been heavily involved with transnational co-operation during the current programme period of 2007 to 2013. In particular, with INTERREG IVC, we have been partners in three transnational projects. They have all had a budget of just under €2 million each and all had about 10 partners each. The three projects have run for three years. Two projects were running at the same time, from 2010 to 2012. The third project is still running. We have also been involved with an intelligent energy project. It had a budget of about €1.5 million with about 10 partners from across Europe. We have also been involved with a small project under Youth in Action called Rural and Proud, which was about a youth exchange with young people from Powys meeting young people from Sweden in order to have experiences and exchange ideas about democracy, citizenship and what it means to be a young person in Europe these days.

[217] I have got to say that the major involvement in INTERREG IVC has been quite significant in Powys. It was the first time that the council had been involved in this type of project, so it was a steep learning curve to begin with, especially considering that two projects were running at the same time. However, we have seen some significant positive outcomes at the end, despite the fact that INTERREG IVC is mostly about sharing experiences and common solutions to share problems. It was quite an interesting outcome of involvement in the projects. We found that, rather than reinventing the wheel, we could talk to partners across Europe and use the projects to focus on common problems and find out about the solutions that other local authorities and public sector organisations have found so that we could adopt them back in Powys. At the same time, we have been able to share our experiences with them. It did not matter what the type of authority was, whether they were European capitals—we have been working with Warsaw and Rome—or rural authorities in Portugal and Sweden; we always found some common ground on which to discuss and share solutions.

[218] The intelligent energy for Europe project was a much more significant project. It looked at reducing carbon dioxide emissions in public and public sector buildings. It had a very high technical aspect in terms of research and finding out about energy consumption in different buildings. We ended up setting up a network of energy officers across Europe who could share experiences, but also provide training to public sector organisations and to community groups that run public sector buildings.

11:30

[219] **Ms Burchell:** In Conwy, we have undertaken two youth in action projects, which are now complete, but we are currently running a lifelong learning project under Leonardo, and we have two Wales-Ireland projects that are currently running as well. Our focus is very similar to Carmarthen's focus because we are based in west Wales and the Valleys and we have access to structural funds, and that tends to be our prime focus, because we have technical assistance that helps to pay for officers for the structural funds. With the other European funding being so resource-heavy, we do not have the resources to dedicate in the same way to undertake the other European programmes.

[220] **Ms Morgan:** We had one associate partner with Pembrokeshire County Council in a pollution project through the Atlantic Arc programme, but it was very minor.

[221] **Julie James:** Can you explain to us how you interact with the wider organisations that you sit within? Are you the main driver for which European programmes you go for? How does that work in each of your organisations?

[222] **Ms Morgan:** Carmarthenshire County Council has had a contract with the European Commission since 1993 to deliver a European information service—Carrefour—and in 2003 that changed to be the Europe Direct function. Our contract with the European Commission is to deliver a European information service.

[223] **Julie James:** Is that just for your area?

[224] **Ms Morgan:** No, for the west Wales area. When we started we were part of Dyfed and then when we changed into Carmarthenshire, we still carried out that service across the west Wales area. The contract is worth €25,000 a year, and we use that money to appoint an officer who is specifically used for networking purposes.

[225] **Joyce Watson:** Just to clarify, what do you mean when you say ‘the west Wales area’?

[226] **Ms Morgan:** Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire.

[227] **Julie James:** So, priorities change depending on—[Inaudible.]—talking to.

[228] Would the rest of you like to tell me how it works in your organisations?

[229] **Mr Compagni:** In Powys, I am responsible for the European and external funding team, and we are a small team based in the authority. Our role is to ensure that the county council and the partner organisations operating in Powys are informed about European funding opportunities and other funding. We help them to engage with the opportunities that are deemed suitable. We also assist these organisations or departments within the authority to run the projects by providing some administrative support and some knowledge support when the projects are running, so that we can ensure that the officers from these specific fields are free to provide their own expertise to the project without having to worry too much about some of the administrative aspects.

[230] **Julie James:** Are you driving the programmes that Powys accesses?

[231] **Mr Compagni:** Yes, because we are in the east Wales area in terms of structural funds, the pressure and the offer from structural funds is much reduced. So, we have to look further afield. That is why we have to cast our net very wide, and we start with INTERREG IVC, because that is a specific programme for local authorities and public sector bodies, but we have gone further with the Intelligent Energy Europe programme, and we have supported communities in their town twinning. We have also been involved in rural development transnational co-ordination, and we have some successful projects there as well. However, it is all mainly driven by Powys, looking at what the priorities are for the county and then engaging in projects and programmes that are suitable to that. So, we are always trying to encourage our colleagues not to chase the pound or the Euro, so to speak, but to ensure that the projects that we want to develop fit with the priorities that we need to deliver.

[232] **Ms Burchell:** It is a similar situation in Conwy in terms of the organisational set up. We have a north and mid Wales specialist European team, which is funded through technical assistance from structural funds, and, as part of that—although this is not eligible for structural funding under technical assistance—we advise and guide people into these various programmes. Again, our focus is more around structural funds, but any organisation within the county of Conwy could come to us with a project idea and we will sit down with them and

help them to try to access whichever funding vehicle is most suitable for that project. It starts with the project rather than with the funding to see what is available.

[233] **Julie James:** How about co-operation across your boundaries?

[234] **Ms Burchell:** Given that there are the specialist European teams—. There are three set up within the whole of Wales—one in north and mid Wales, one in the south-east and one in the south-west—and we meet up on a regular basis. We meet on a quarterly basis as European officers to discuss best practice and our experiences with all of the funding streams to try to bring together our experiences to see whether we can help each other.

[235] **William Graham:** Dafydd Elis-Thomas is next.

[236] **Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas:** Diolch yn fawr ichi am eich ymatebion. Yr hyn, efallai, sy'n peri rhywfaint o bryder inni yw bod cymaint o ganolbwyntio ar y gwariant ar gronfeydd strwythurol a'r gronfa datblygu wledig. A ydych yn rhagweld y bydd hyn yn parhau yn ystod y blynyddoedd nesaf, gan mai'r pwyslais a roddir bellach gan y Comisiwn Ewropeaidd yn y rhaglenni gwario yw ar geisio edrych ar y modd y mae'r rhai sy'n derbyn grantiau a chymorthdaliadau Ewropeaidd yn gwario ar draws rhaglenni? Efallai y byddai llai o ddiddordeb mewn rhoi cefnogaeth mewn un gronfa oherwydd nad oes llwyddiant mewn sicrhau cyllid mewn cronfeydd eraill. Rwyf yn meddwl yn arbennig am y cronfeydd yr ydym wedi bod yn eu trafod yn gynharach, cronfeydd fel INTERREG ac Erasmus+.

Lord Elis-Thomas: Thank you very much for your responses. What, perhaps, concerns us is that there is so much concentration on the expenditure on structural funds and the rural development funds. Do you see this continuing during the next few years, given that the emphasis now from the European Commission in the expenditure programmes is on trying to look at the way that those who receive grants and subsidies from Europe are spending across programmes? Perhaps there would be less interest in providing support in one fund because of a lack of a lack of success in ensuring funding in other areas. I am thinking particularly of the funds that we have already discussed this morning, such as INTERREG and Erasmus+.

[237] **Ms Morgan:** Gyda chronfeydd fel ERDF ac ESF, mae cymaint mwy o sgôp i wneud mwy o bethau. Er enghraifft, o fewn ERDF, mae sgôp i wneud gwaith cyfalaf, sef adeiladu pethau. Ar lefel strategol, fel cyngor sir mae'n rhaid inni ddilyn ein strategaeth, a'n strategaeth ni yw adfywio. Felly, mae'n rhaid inni ddilyn y strategaeth honno.

Ms Morgan: With funds like the ERDF and ESF, there is so much more scope to do more things. For example, within ERDF there is scope to carry out capital work—to build things. On a strategic level, as a county council we have to follow our strategy, and our strategy is to regenerate. So, we have to follow that strategy.

[238] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Do you wish to add something to that?

[239] **Ms Burchell:** I would just echo Helen's comments, really. We are very much driven by our own local authority and our own local strategies from our elected members. So, we do have to focus—they always want to see something at the end of the project. However, that is not always possible with INTERREG-type projects. While they are obviously very valuable in their own right, they do not put a building at the end of the street, for example. I think that that is possibly the difference.

[240] **Mr Compagni:** Coming from a different perspective, as I said there is less emphasis on the structural funds programmes in east Wales, and Powys in particular. That is one of the reasons why we have been more involved with INTERREG. However, that is not the whole story. We have found that it is a bit more difficult to explain the benefits and the long-term

sustainability of the results that can be achieved through INTERREG, compared, as Barbara said, to building a road or having a tangible output at the end of the project. What we have found, as a result of our involvement with the INTERREG projects in particular, is that the capacity of the officers within the authority and within the organisations that we work with has benefited the most. That provides a long-lasting, but less easily measurable, benefit within the authorities. It also provides a legacy that enables us to interact and to develop further projects with the transnational partnership that is already successfully established through these projects. By working for three years with partners across Europe, you get to know who is better suited to work with you and who has similar types of issues and solutions to share. That is the difficult part of it—the engagement with the transnational project is much more long term, so it is much more difficult to establish it straight away at the beginning and to create the involvement in the authority or the partner organisations.

[241] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** So, how do you foresee your role in developing this for the Welsh Local Government Association in the future?

[242] **Mr Compagni:** I am a European adviser to the WLGA, so I will collect some of the information and experiences from colleagues. It is about the role of co-ordinating the experience and knowledge regarding what has worked and what has not. The WLGA has an office in Brussels that keeps in contact with those who are seeking local authority partners or community partners, and requests are filtered down to us in the local authorities. That is another mechanism to enable us to find out who is doing what in terms of international projects.

[243] As I have said, there is not a full understanding—or involvement—in relation to what the projects require, which sometimes creates a bit of concern or tends to scare some of the officers away, as it is an unknown. Our role is very much about explaining how things can be done. The WLGA can help to ensure that some of this knowledge is shared at a local level in Wales.

[244] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** I am sure that you can understand where we are coming from in asking these questions; it is about seeking to maximise the participation of Welsh local authorities directly within the European project, and all kinds of European projects.

[245] **Ms Burchell:** May I add to Filippo's comments? In the new programming period, which is coming up very shortly, as specialist European team officers, we are looking very much to assist in the integration of all of these funds. We are looking at structural funds and at the wider European funds, INTERREG and the Wales-Ireland programme, and it is our desire to maximise their use. Integration will lead to better outputs and better results, but we need the resources to integrate those, because, once again, our focus will be on structural funds, naturally, because of the strategies within local authorities that are driving us in that direction. However, it is our intention to give a fully-rounded service to our local authority areas and we would like to be able to have the resources to dedicate to looking at other funding streams and to be able to integrate these as a whole, make everything more holistic and make everything work better.

[246] **Ms Morgan:** I would like to echo Barbara's comments. Moving on, as Barbara has said, there is a new role for the specialist European teams. We have been focused on structural funds, but perhaps we need to look at how we can facilitate more projects—projects like the new INTERREG programme. That is something that we are feeding back via the WLGA.

[247] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** I am a council tax payer in Conwy, and I have had the answer that I wanted. Thank you very much.

[248] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** Hoffwn ychwanegu at yr hyn sydd wedi cael ei godi yn barod. Rydych wedi dweud yn barod, yn y gorllewin ac yng Nghonwy, mai dilyn y strategaeth sy'n cael ei gosod gan y gwleidyddion ac yna'r swyddogion ar y cyngor rydych yn ei wneud. A oes eisiau rhagor o arweiniad gennych ynglŷn â newid y strategaeth honno? Filippo, sut ydych yn dymuno gweld rôl y CLILC ym Mrwsel yn newid i roi cyngor ar ddatblygu'r strategaeth honno?

Rhun ap Iorwerth: I would like to add to what has been raised already. You have already said that, in west Wales and in Conwy, you follow the strategy that is set by the politicians and then the council officials. Is there a need for more leadership from you with regard to changing that strategy? Filippo, how do you wish to see the WLGA's role in Brussels changing in order to provide advice on developing that strategy?

[249] **Ms Morgan:** Mae sir Gâr yn rhan o'r *Swansea bay city region*, sy'n dod â'i strategaeth ei hunan. Mae'n strategaeth ni fel cyngor sir yn cydlynw â strategaeth *Swansea Bay*. Felly, ar y foment, nid oes unrhyw beth yn y strategaeth honno sy'n edrych ar weithio gyda lleoedd fel Iwerddon.

Ms Morgan: Carmarthenshire is part of the Swansea bay city region, which comes with its own strategy. Our strategy as a county council is aligned with that of Swansea bay. So, at the moment, there is nothing in that strategy that looks at working with places such as Ireland.

[250] **Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas:** A Napoli, rwy'n gobeithio. [*Chwerthin.*]

Lord Elis-Thomas: And Napoli, I hope. [*Laughter.*]

[251] **Rhun ap Iorwerth:** A fuasech yn dymuno gweld hynny yn cael ei ddatblygu? A ydych yn gweld gwendid yna ar hyn ar hyn o bryd?

Rhun ap Iorwerth: Do you wish to see that being developed? Do you see a weakness there at present?

[252] **Ms Morgan:** Ffocws *Swansea bay* ar y foment yw edrych ar y rhaglenni strwythurol a thwristiaeth. Dyna'r ddau ffocws.

Ms Morgan: Swansea bay is currently focused on the structural programmes and tourism. Those are the two things that are being focused upon.

[253] **Mr Compagni:** You raised an interesting point about political engagement in these programmes. Our experience, in one of the three INTERREG projects that we had, is that the project created a political steering group. So, each of the 10 organisations that were partners in the project provided an elected member, and they came together every six months to discuss the findings of the project and to ensure that the direction was suitable. That was important for two reasons: first, to ensure that there is engagement back at home to deliver the projects, and that the organisation felt that it was the right thing to do. However, more than that, because INTERREG IVC is particularly about finding solutions for policy objectives, having the political level involved at the beginning, when these policy objectives are discussed and shaped, is very important. The elected member—the cabinet member, in our case—was then able to come back to the base in the council and shape the strategies from the top, according to the solutions and ideas shared with other politicians across Europe. So, that is why it was very important to have that.

11:45

[254] In this case, it was a specific visible, explicit presence, but we have found that we have also built that presence implicitly in the other two projects that we had. For example, every time we had a meeting of the partners from across Europe in Powys, it was opened by either the chair of the council or the Cabinet member responsible for the policy area that the project dealt with. This ensured that council officers had the right idea of why the project was

important, but it also showed the partners who came from across Europe to Powys that we cared about the project and wanted to give the partnership the highest support that we could.

[255] **Ms Morgan:** A gaf i ychwanegu at hynny? Mae'n rhaid ichi ddeall hefyd faint o amser mae'n cymryd i ddod â phrosiectau at ei gilydd. Mae'n gallu cymryd hyd at rhyw ddwy flynedd i gael y syniad a'r partneriaid at ei gilydd, ac mae rhai partneriaid yn cwympo allan ac mae rhai newydd yn dod i mewn. Ambell waith, mae 10 partneriaeth mewn 10 gwlad wahanol. Os ydych chi'n arwain ar y prosiect hwnnw, mae lot o risg ar y cyngor sir i fod yn gyfrifol am brosiect dros 10 gwlad, felly, mae'n rhaid inni ystyried hynny hefyd.

Ms Morgan: May I add to that? You also have to understand how much time it takes to bring projects forward. It can take up to two years to work on the idea and to bring the partnerships together, and some partners fall out and new partners come in. Sometimes, there are partnerships across 10 different countries. If you lead on that project, there is a lot of risk associated with that for the county council to be responsible for a project that covering 10 countries, so we have to give that consideration as well.

[256] **Ms Burchell:** I will just mention that, living in Conwy, we are following our strategy, in effect, with the projects that we already have in place. In Conwy, our main focus and priority is tourism, which is the lifeblood of Conwy county. However, we also have a large elderly population. The three projects that we currently have—two of them are Ireland-Wales and one is the lifelong learning programme. The first project is an outdoor tourism project that brings together the outdoor sector, of which we have an abundance in Conwy. One of the other two looks at exchanging knowledge and best practice with other organisations to recruit and train volunteers to work with elderly people, which is under the Leonardo programme, and the other one is an intergenerational project—the Ireland-Wales project—that looks at encouraging different generations to recognise the worth in each other, to work together and to work on projects.

[257] So, we would very much like to dedicate more time and resource to looking for other similar projects and to utilise this under-used funding, if I may. However, as Helen said, it is so resource-heavy, it really needs a dedicated officer, because of the development time needed to put the project together and do partner searches. It is a lot easier to be a partner in a project than it is to lead a project, and I think that that is always the hesitation, because of the risk—local authorities are risk-averse in these times. There is also the match funding element, as well; we do not have a lot of spare revenue, either. I think that that is our difficulty going forward, but that is true of all of us and I do not know quite how we would overcome that challenge.

[258] **Mick Antoniwi:** From the evidence that you have given so far, it seems that the role of the WLGA is really one of a facilitator, adviser and assister in projects that councils decide are important to them in terms of deciding their priorities. Is that a fair assessment of the role of the WLGA?

[259] **Mr Campagni:** Yes. I will just clarify that I work for Powys County Council and, occasionally, I am a WLGA adviser on European affairs. I have been liaising with the WLGA team leader on regeneration in Europe about the WLGA point of view and she asked me to convey some of the views. Of course, a co-ordinating role in terms of intelligence and information is important. The role of the association is very much to help local authorities to engage also on European policy matters, and the structural funds are of primary importance.

[260] In terms of support and interaction on project development, it has so far had a lesser role, because of the dedication that is needed from the ground, first of all. So, the association's role so far has been to add value, to look for partners, and to help with some of the development of the projects, but not initiate them straight away. So, just to make that

clear.

[261] **Mick Antoniw:** Do you think that the WLGA plays a sufficiently strategic role within Europe, within the broader development and initiation of policy and funding opportunities, and so on?

[262] **Mr Compagni:** What has been said so far from colleagues from west Wales and the Valleys rings true for the WLGA—the focus of the engagement on European affairs is very much on the structural funds, because of the size of the funding programme, but also because of the more direct control that Wales and Welsh local authorities can have over the funds, whereas the trans-national funds are, as you well know, managed at European level. So, there is a lesser role of engagement to be had there compared to the structural funds. That is not to say that they should not be there. There is an increased role to be had, perhaps, going forward.

[263] **Mick Antoniw:** Do you think that there is a sufficiently conjoined and strategic link with Welsh Government activity in Europe? Could that improve, and if it could improve, how could it improve?

[264] **Mr Compagni:** It could definitely improve, because there is not enough strategic involvement or even operational involvement. My colleagues can corroborate that each involvement we have had with trans-national projects has been off our own back, and has been purely the initiative of the local authority. There has not been much support at Welsh Government level, one way or another. The focus is very often on the structural funds, mainly, and in terms of transnational co-operation, it is more difficult to find what the Welsh Government has offered to us so far in terms of local government.

[265] **Ms Burchell:** The potential for a single point of contact within Welsh Government or WEFO would ease matters greatly. It is a challenge, because we have to go to so many different organisations, depending on the funding that we are looking for, whereas if there was one point of contact within Welsh Government or WEFO, that would just make things a little easier—if we could get the information from just one source, rather than having to trail through all the different sources to find the funding that we are looking for.

[266] **Mick Antoniw:** How frequently do local government, through the WLGA, and the Welsh Government and, perhaps, the other interests in higher education, get together? Do they sit down in Brussels and prepare their annual strategy or their long-term strategy or their short-term strategy? How often does that happen? How does it happen? Does it happen?

[267] **Mr Compagni:** It does not happen in our experience with Welsh Government. As far as we know, we have had a couple of general engagement events on INTERREG run by WEFO, and that was the extent of the involvement that we have had. Sitting together, or having a more formal or regular sharing of experience, and knowing who is doing what in Wales in terms of trans-national projects, would be a positive way forward, but it is not there at the moment. In terms of the WLGA, as you were asking, there is that potential for co-ordination and dissemination of the exchange of opportunities and possibilities. As we said before, the difficulty is to find the resources back in the local authority or partner organisations that can be dedicated to some of the trans-national work. That is mostly the difficulty, so while at Brussels level there is the interest—there is the partner search service, and the possibility to engage there—it is back at home that the knowledge and the interest needs to be developed. Some see it as a distraction of resources, but if we look at it as a long-term investment instead, which builds capacity, that is where the conjunction between the two roles should be had.

[268] **Mick Antoniw:** So, you would welcome more strategic leadership within Europe from Welsh Government.

[269] **Mr Compagni:** Yes, absolutely.

[270] **Ms Morgan:** Improved communication as well.

[271] **Keith Davies:** Byddaf yn gofyn yn Gymraeg. **Keith Davies:** I will ask in Welsh.

[272] Mae'r dystiolaeth o Ynys Môn yn rhoi'r bai ar yr awdurdodau, gan ddweud bod diffyg arweinyddiaeth yn yr awdurdodau ar raglenni y tu fas i'r *structural funds*. Mae hefyd yn dweud y dylai bod un pwynt cyswllt er mwyn i bobl allu mynd at un pwynt. Nid wyf yn siarad am Frwsel yn awr; rwy'n siarad am Gymru. Mae tystiolaeth Ynys Môn yn dweud dau beth: yn gyntaf, y pwynt cyswllt—rwy'n derbyn hynny—ond hefyd nad oes arweinyddiaeth yn yr awdurdodau, fel rwy'n darllen y dystiolaeth, ar raglenni y tu fas i'r *structural funds*; rhaglenni eraill yr Undeb Ewropeaidd. Dyna dystiolaeth Ynys Môn i ni.

The evidence from Anglesey places the blame on the authorities, saying that there is a lack of leadership in the authorities for programmes outside the structural funds. It also says that there should be a single contact point so that people can go to one point. I am not talking about Brussels now; I am talking about Wales. The Anglesey evidence says two things: first, the contact point—I accept that—but also that there is no leadership within the authorities, which is how I read the evidence, on programmes outside the structural funds; other European programmes. That is Anglesey's evidence to us.

[273] **Ms Morgan:** A gaf ofyn pwy o Ynys Môn a ddywedodd hynny?

Ms Morgan: May I ask who from Anglesey said that?

[274] **Keith Davies:** Nid wyf yn gwybod pwy sydd wedi rhoi'r dystiolaeth ond—

Keith Davies: I am not sure who provided the evidence but—

[275] **Ms Burchell:** It is Dylan Williams, who is the head of the—

[276] **Keith Davies:** Mae sôn hefyd am y diffyg arweinyddiaeth tu fewn i'r awdurdodau lleol—dyna sut yr oeddwn i'n darllen y peth. Rydych yn gweithio'n galed ar y *structural funds* a phethau gwledig, ond wedyn, o ran cael cyllid o raglenni eraill yr Undeb Ewropeaidd, nid oes gan yr awdurdodau unrhyw arweinyddiaeth ar y peth.

Keith Davies: There is also mention of a lack of leadership within local authorities—that is how I read the evidence. You are working hard on the structural funds and rural issues, but then, in terms of drawing down funding from other European Union programmes, the authorities have no leadership on it.

[277] **Ms Morgan:** I fynd yn ôl at fy mhwynt gwreiddiol, nid yw'n rhan o *priority* sir Gâr i edrych yn fwy rhyngwladol. Rhaid inni edrych ar bobl sir Gâr a beth sydd orau iddynt. Ar y foment, beth sydd orau i bobl sir Gâr yw creu swyddi sy'n mynd ymlaen i'r dyfodol. Felly, dyna pam mae ERDF ac ESF mor bwysig, achos nhw sy'n creu'r swyddi.

Ms Morgan: To return to my original point, it is not a Carmarthenshire priority to look more internationally. We have to look at the people of Carmarthenshire and what is best for them. At the moment, what is best for the people of Carmarthenshire is creating jobs that will be sustainable in the future. Therefore, that is why ERDF and ESF are so important, because they create the jobs.

[278] **Keith Davies:** Gofynnais hyn hefyd i'r grŵp oedd yma cyn chi. Darllenais o'r dystiolaeth y bydd y cyllid sydd ar gael i

Keith Davies: I also asked this to the group that was here before you. I read from the evidence that the funding that was available

Erasmus+ i weithio gyda ieuenctid yn codi 70% yn y chwe blynedd nesaf. Os nad yw'r awdurdodau am gwrso'r pethau yma, byddwn ni'n colli mas yng Nghymru.

for Erasmus+ to work with young people will see a 70% increase over the next six years. If authorities do not chase those things, we are going to lose out in Wales.

[279] **Ms Morgan:** Dywedaf wrthyhych beth sydd wedi digwydd ers mis Ionawr drwy Erasmus+. Trwy rôl *Europe Direct* y ganolfan, rydym wedi cydweithio gyda Cyngor Sir Ceredigion er mwyn hyfforddi athrawon yn y ddwy sir ynglŷn â beth y gallant ei gael allan o Erasmus+.

Ms Morgan: I will tell you what has happened since January through Erasmus+. Through the Europe Direct role of the centre, we have worked collaboratively with Ceredigion County Council to train teachers in the two counties on what they could get out of Erasmus+.

[280] **Mr Compagni:** I think that, once again, it is a matter of focus and different local authorities may have different experiences. As I said, Powys is heavily involved in transnational co-operation. One reason is because of the lack of focus on the structural funds and resources not being focused on the structural funds, but the other is because we have built from the very beginning of the programming period that involvement at leadership level with the Cabinet member and the chief executive. We have been working with them from the beginning on the importance of involving not just national projects that will not lead directly at the end of the project to a concrete specific output, but will help increase the capacity of the organisations and its offices to enable them to work better and smarter in the long-term. It is hard work; it is paper heavy and there is a lot of administrative work to be done. This is what sometimes scares organisations and why it might be perceived as a lack of leadership or why different levels of organisations may not want to be involved directly.

[281] However, if the matters are debated, discussed and approached in a structural way from the very beginning to ensure that the structure is there from the beginning, and to ensure that the opportunities, when they arise, which can be very quick to materialise but take a long time to develop, are ready to be taken. The leadership needs to be involved from the very beginning of the programming period and today is an excellent opportunity to start to have that mature debate.

[282] **Ms Burchell:** Yes, certainly, we take the point that there are more funds available now in this new programming round. So, we are working with our youth service internally to try to seek project ideas to look to assist them into developing new projects to take advantage of the funding. However, again, it needs to be something that the local authority has to be behind. For any project that we want to progress, we have to have our cabinet approval. So, we could be developing quite a substantial project for either the cabinet to say no, or for us to invest two years of development work, partner searches and getting everything ready only then for the application to fail.

12:00

[283] **Keith Davies:** It is particularly important when local authorities are having their budgets cut, say, for youth services.

[284] **Ms Burchell:** Absolutely. Of course, yes, and there is more focus now on youth services with the new developments that have just come about. So, yes, definitely, it is something that we will be looking to pursue, but, again, it comes down to people on the ground, unfortunately, and the resources that we have to hand.

[285] **William Graham:** Joyce, would you like to ask question 47, as question 46 has largely been answered?

[286] **Joyce Watson:** Yes. I could ask a load of questions, such as, ‘Why are you not all working together?’, but that is a very broad issue. However, I will ask the question in front of me. This question is for you, Filippo—I hope that I have pronounced your name right. The WLGA has made three recommendations to us, and one is enabling joint working across organisations and sectors, another is regional supporting arrangements, including the creation of regional team support, and the third is promoting the benefits of transnational working. What role would you like the Welsh Government to play in strengthening and promoting participation from Wales in the EU programmes covered in that inquiry, and in delivering on the three recommendations that the WLGA has presented to us in its paper?

[287] **Mr Compagni:** There is an important role to be played by the Welsh Government, in terms of engagement, at both national and regional level. The direction of travel of the European Commission for the future of structural funds and the rural development fund is very much one of integration and that reverberates to the other funds as well. It is about integration of the opportunities of using the funds together, not necessarily in the same projects, but on a set of activities that can have a wider impact. So, the role of the Welsh Government and that of the Assembly could be very much to enable that co-ordination by having a similar set of eligibility rules or technical mechanisms providing some of the focus for match funding, for instance, as we know that finding match funding to enable those things to happen is difficult, especially, for local authorities. A fund dedicated to that, as we know other countries in Europe are doing for transnational projects, could be done. Again, it could raise awareness of what the opportunities are, provide engagement when the opportunities are fit for the priorities to be engaged with and to provide assistance with the delivery of the projects, in terms of the administration and making contact with the technical secretariats that run some of these programmes. Why not lobby for some of the projects that are coming from Wales when the Welsh Government sits on some of the committees of the transnational funds programmes?

[288] **William Graham:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you very much for your evidence today. A transcript will be sent to you of today’s evidence in a few days’ time. Thank you very much for your attendance today. That closes the formal part of our meeting.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12:03.
The meeting ended at 12:03.*