

## **Enterprise and Business Committee**

Inquiry into EU Funding Opportunities 2014–2020

**Engagement event with Cardiff University and Cardiff Metropolitan University  
Cyncoed Campus, Thursday 6 March 2014**

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### **Purpose**

The aim of this event was for Members of the Enterprise and Business Committee to hear the views and experiences of students, staff and academics from Cardiff University and Cardiff Metropolitan University about the European Union's Erasmus programme. This scheme enables higher education students to study or work abroad as part of their degree, and staff to teach or train in other European countries.

Nineteen people took part in the event. Assembly Members facilitated discussion among five groups on the following three themes:

- What motivated students and staff to take part in an exchange programme; what their experience had been; and what impact it had on them personally and academically;
- The benefits and barriers to encouraging more graduating students to study outside the UK for a period of their studies;
- How Wales can better support the outward mobility of students and maximise opportunities from engagement in EU programmes like Erasmus.

Assembly Members summarised the main points from each group to the full group.

## Summary of the main points made

### 1. Experiences and benefits of the Erasmus programme

- The Erasmus programme is a definite success story.
- Erasmus broadens horizons, outlooks and experiences – it gives students “the edge” and makes them “stand out” from the rest.
- Erasmus is important on a political level as it develops cultural understanding and builds institutional and personal networks and links, including lifelong friends.
- Erasmus promotes positive attitudes and closer bonds with the EU.
- Erasmus students achieve and perform better academically.
- Students who choose to go away are more likely to take up postgraduate education.
- Erasmus students come from a variety of degree courses – e.g. modern languages, business, medicine.
- There are several motivating factors (e.g. university, school).
- Erasmus students described the administrative support offered by Cardiff University as “excellent”, although they thought the choice of universities to study abroad was quite limited.
- There was support for Cardiff University’s target for 17 per cent of graduating students to study abroad, but better consistency needs to be achieved across different departments and courses, e.g. Erasmus is compulsory for language courses but often not possible in others because of their degree credit systems.
- Cardiff Metropolitan University does not currently have an outward mobility target but is not far off.
- Erasmus Mundus is important for promoting staff mobility to non-European countries.

- Cardiff Metropolitan University has been very successful in the Erasmus Mundus programme, participating in 12 projects and leading on 6, which is more than any other institution in the UK.
- As well as giving students a great experience, Wales needs to retain the benefits not just increase the export of Welsh talent.
- There are clear benefits for universities and businesses too, e.g. increased employability, marketing/attractiveness of universities, the relationships and networks offered to university staff.
- Mobility and studying abroad should be part of all degree courses and not the exception.

## **2. Barriers to encouraging more graduating students to study abroad**

- It can be difficult to engage students in the Erasmus programme – the number studying is falling.
- Finances are probably the biggest barrier, especially where students have to pay for tuition fees and accommodation abroad as well as at home.
- Under Erasmus+ there will no longer be fully funded scholarships for Erasmus Mundus.
- There is a lack of awareness about Erasmus in schools and among students not studying a language at university.
- There can be cultural barriers to students studying abroad, such as lack of confidence or perceptions of other countries and languages, although many of the courses available at European universities are through the medium of English, and therefore lack of knowledge of a European language need not be a barrier for those wanting to study abroad.
- Parents can also be a major obstacle as they play a key role in decisions over undergraduate courses in particular.
- Healthcare students tend to be female and/or mature with family commitments, which limits their ability to study abroad for a long period of time.

- An extended period abroad can prove unsettling for some Erasmus students when trying to integrate back into life and studies at their home university.
- Much of the drive comes from the passion and enthusiasm of individual staff as opposed to a coherent strategy.

### **3. How Wales can better support outward mobility of students**

- There needs to be a national mobility strategy.
- There could be more funding to promote and market the programme and the benefits of participating – perhaps facilitated from a single point for the whole of Wales.
- There could be funding available (means-tested perhaps?) to enable greater take-up of opportunities.
- Funding should also be available to academics and coordinators to facilitate networking and meetings with European partners.
- Awareness of Erasmus should be raised with younger students, say 14 to 15-year olds through schools and with the Careers Service, as well as universities.
- School children should all have the opportunity to experience foreign exchange visits.
- Erasmus students should be used as ambassadors for the programme and to share their experiences with other students through “lecture shouts” and fairs.
- Cardiff University is setting up an ambassador programme for its new centre this autumn; Cardiff Metropolitan University has been working with individual schools – some of whom are more engaged than others.
- There needs to be greater understanding and awareness of the benefits and value of participating in Erasmus, particularly among parents.
- The administration of Erasmus could be improved.
- More non-language students should be encouraged to participate in Erasmus.

- Monitoring, measuring, bench-marking and evaluation of student mobility could be better to capture all the activity that is happening and to have a full debrief of students' experiences.
- It is important to keep in contact with Erasmus students through a database and to track their employability and longer term destinations.
- More could be done to harness the links between Erasmus students and businesses.
- There needs to be impetus and drive at an institutional level, with a coherent strategy that has the buy-in from staff and students.
- There also needs to be individual commitment and drive – pioneers of change who can lever in resources and make things happen.
- There should be more targets for increasing the percentage of students studying abroad.
- There should be shorter, more flexible placements available (say 1 to 2 weeks) before students commit to longer-term exchanges, and funding allocated for that, e.g. a bursary scheme for exchange programmes during the summer.
- The European links developed through Welsh Government and National Assembly channels should be exploited to benefit exchanges for Welsh students and higher education.
- Language training should be offered to support Erasmus students.
- Learning languages should be compulsory in primary and secondary schools.
- University semester cycles and degree structures should be more compatible with Erasmus placement terms.
- Regulatory bodies should be more accommodating in their credit systems to recognise the value of students studying abroad.
- Erasmus students should be awarded extra credits.
- International mobility/activity could be included in the criteria for academic/staff promotion to encourage international exchange.

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