

Introduction

ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales Economy Infrastructure & Skills Committee inquiry into “Selling Wales to the World”. ColegauCymru represents the 13¹ further education (FE) colleges and FE institutions in Wales² and promotes the public benefit of post compulsory education and learning.

Colleges are major providers of general education provision in Wales, helping to produce some of the best learner outcomes. Colleges are the predominant providers of funded vocational and technical education in Wales, providing about 85% of the total provision.

How Welsh and UK Governments sell Wales to the World at present in terms of trade, tourism and skills/training

Further Education institutions could play a greater role in assisting the Welsh and UK Governments to promote Wales’ skills and training opportunities. FE institutions have grown increasingly attuned to the needs of businesses in recent years and look for flexible and innovative ways to support the training needs of businesses at all levels. Improved and more consistent interaction between relevant FE staff (for example business development, international and European officers) and officials from Welsh Government (WG) economy departments dealing with inward investment, including foreign direct investment, would be helpful. This would enable both sides to gain a better understanding of what each offers. It would also enable a more joined up approach to promoting the innovative support around skills that FEIs in Wales provide. The WG has recently formed an ‘International Group’ chaired by Des Clifford, Principal Secretary to the First Minister for Wales that includes British Council Wales, Universities Wales, and WG inward investment/trade reps. However, our understanding is that there is no sector-wide representation from Further Education or the wider work-based learning/skills sector. This is disappointing and needs to be addressed urgently. Whilst individual colleges and learning providers are more than capable of promoting themselves as individual institutions, clearer direction needs to be maintained to ensure that Wales itself, is seen as a destination for inward investment into people as well as to a place. These areas should not be an afterthought, but rather a core part of the offer from Wales.

ColegauCymru’s recent engagement with the Visit Wales Partnership Team, and planned future collaboration will hopefully see the skills agenda and college services better promoted to the tourist industry in Wales. In turn, this will support the development of a more highly and appropriately skilled nation.

¹ The 13 include 10 FE corporations and two FE institutions, St David’s Catholic College and Adult Learning Wales. The College Merthyr Tydfil, and Coleg Sir Gâr are part of university groupings.

² In this paper the terms ‘FE college’ and ‘college’ are used to cover FE colleges and FE institutions.

ColegauCymru has also developed a strong partnership with British Council Wales and, more widely, with British Council's UK skills team. As a result of the charity's strategic input, FE colleges in Wales have been successful in sourcing British Council's Skills for Employability funding to support capacity building and leadership development in vocational education and training (VET) in countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, South Africa and Tunisia. In addition, ColegauCymru supported British Council in bringing its biennial UK China People to People (P2P) event to Cardiff in 2015. The vocational roundtable that was part of the P2P was held at Cardiff and Vale College and attracted delegates from all over the UK who met with the senior level Chinese delegation.

ColegauCymru is a partner in a British Council Global Spotlight event in Cardiff in March 2018. The theme of the forthcoming event is apprenticeships and it provides an opportunity for the skills sector in Wales to showcase best practice in employer engagement and work-based learning. British Council will invite senior government officials from selected countries around the world to participate in the event, which will take place over three days at Cardiff and Vale College, and will also include visits to other colleges and employers.

ColegauCymru was a reciprocal partner in British Council's Going Global 2017, a conference for leaders in international education and has been invited to undertake the same role for Going Global 2018. ColegauCymru's Chief Executive also presented in a workshop in Going Global 2017.

In partnership with the British Council ColegauCymru in February/March 2017 led a delegation of FE leaders to Seattle, USA. During the visit, its staff and delegates from five colleges met with federal officials, business intermediary bodies as well as businesses within the aerospace and advanced manufacturing sectors and their training providers. ColegauCymru would welcome a closer working relationship with officials across Welsh Government in order to exploit the value of these relationships.

The role of the Welsh Government's overseas offices

ColegauCymru has engaged with some of the Welsh Government's overseas offices in recent years and they have played a useful role in terms of facilitation and information sharing. The Washington DC and San Francisco office staff were very helpful in facilitating links for the IPLC (International Professional Learning Community) visit to Seattle, funded by British Council Wales referenced above.

The CEO and European & International Coordinator of ColegauCymru visited Brussels in March 2016 for St David's Day celebrations and met with staff from the WG office. Following the appointment of a new WG officer to the Brussels staff in 2016, there has been fairly regular email communication in relation to Erasmus+, VET skills week and the 2017 VET awards.

In addition, staff from the overseas office in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) met with ColegauCymru and some International Managers in January and October 2016 to discuss skills and educational needs in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region.

Some contact with staff from the overseas office in India has taken place in the past three to four years in relation to developing UKIERI (UK India Education and Research Initiative) bids.

FE International Managers on overseas visits will sometimes make contact with Welsh Government offices in that region – a list of names and contact details would be useful for ColegauCymru to assist with linking people together. Receiving regular updates from Welsh Government overseas offices would also be useful to inform colleges about current activity or development plans. There may be opportunities for FE that are currently missed due to a lack of understanding of what FE can do.

In the last three to four years, overseas staff from Welsh Government have undertaken training in Wales – normally in April/May. ColegauCymru staff gave a presentation to a delegation around four years ago on Further Education alongside Higher Education representatives. Despite repeated requests to the Welsh Government's European and External Affairs Department office (EEAD) for overseas delegates to visit some FE colleges while in Wales to see first hand what is on offer, this has sadly, never taken place.

ColegauCymru, on behalf of the FE sector, employed a full time member of staff in the Welsh Government Chongqing office to be responsible for developing partnerships and commercial opportunities for the Wales China FE Consortium. The Consortium ran from 2011 – 2016. During this period there was a great deal of contact with the Chongqing office and also with the offices in Shanghai and Beijing. This has reduced since the consortium ended in 2016 but individual colleges continue to work with the Chinese offices on occasion.

Welsh and UK Government support for exporters, and inward investment

Please refer to comments above with regard to how closer links between officials in the relevant Welsh Government departments and staff in FEIs could prove beneficial.

Colleges should be crucial Welsh Government partners in attracting inward investment to Wales and have played a key role in attracting large employers to Wales, e.g. Aston Martin; Hitachi; GE and Airbus. Leading on the local skills agenda to ensure the current and future talent pool is work-ready, FE colleges are committed to responding to industry needs. However, with the exception of occasional examples, there does not appear to be a coherent strategy for involving and engaging the Further Education sector consistently in discussions around inward investment in particular, with a seemingly piecemeal approach taken.

More widely, education can be considered a potential export but it is not clear that the Welsh Government always sees Further Education in this light. The situation is slightly different in relation to the UK Government who, by default, contact the Association of Colleges (AoC) with information on international opportunities for the UK skills sector. As the AoC's membership is largely based in England, it would be extremely useful for communication channels between UK Department for International Trade (formerly UKTI) and the Welsh Government to be improved to ensure that these opportunities are publicised and made available from the start to all countries in the UK. Improved links would also highlight to UK Government the support on offer from the FE sector in Wales for potential inward investors.

There is a need for greater clarity about the role and structure of the Welsh Government's European and External Affairs Department, the inward investment/trade teams and overseas staff, and how they relate to each other. At present, it is not clear who does what, especially in light of negotiations around the UK's departure from the EU.

The knowledge of 'Wales.Com' web site and in particular the help given by Business Wales

ColegauCymru would welcome the chance to improve the FE sector's webpages on Wales.com. It would be useful to know who is responsible for the content of this part of the website and to work together to produce something more cohesive and up to date with vocational images in addition to academic ones. The Study in Wales brand and the Global Wales partnership are both university-led initiatives that have received funding and support from Welsh Government and British Council Wales. The skills sector in Wales would benefit from similar support to develop its own brand and identity for international marketing. This is a conversation ColegauCymru has begun with British Council Wales.

The clarity and strength of Wales's international tourism "brand"

FE colleges are committed to the outdoor industry and provide a sustainable supply of skilled individuals to support economic growth and success in this space. Colleges ensure that qualifications are internationally recognised (EQF, European Qualifications Framework) allowing for international transferability and learner opportunities. Building on the available skilled workforce can support the clarity of the tourism 'brand'.

How Colleges/Universities promote international studying in Wales

FE institutions in Wales promote international studying in Wales in a variety of ways. This includes activities such as summer and winter schools (mainly for Chinese students) combining English language learning, taster A level or vocational classes as well as cultural and social visits in Wales. The aim is to recruit students to study either A level or vocational courses in Wales. Some colleges have also established strong partnerships with schools/colleges overseas for A level delivery, capacity building in VET education and leadership training for VET staff and principals. For further details, see Annex 1 at the end of this paper. The Erasmus+ programme is particularly valuable: FE colleges in Wales have developed strong partnerships with vocational colleges across Europe through Erasmus+. The colleges in Europe source work placements for learners from Wales. FE colleges in Wales then offer reciprocal opportunities for learners from across Europe to undertake work placements in Wales or training periods in salons and workshops within the colleges in Wales. This helps build staff, student and institutional relationships. Many students have been offered employment in the businesses who have hosted their work placements, demonstrating the value of skills developed at FEIs in Wales.

The use made of support from the EU and the impact of Brexit

ColegauCymru and FEIs across Wales have benefitted greatly from European funding generally – see separate ColegauCymru report on *Involvement of Welsh Further Education colleges and institutions in EU funding* (forthcoming). In terms of specific initiatives, as noted above, the impact of the Erasmus+ programme is invaluable in terms of two-way exchange of knowledge and skills between Wales FEIs and students and the partnership countries.

ColegauCymru has also developed Erasmus+ pan Wales staff mobility projects. These projects provide continuous professional development opportunities for senior leaders, middle leaders and tutors to explore best practice in different European countries. Themes that have been explored on these projects include embedding literacy & numeracy in VET (Finland), innovation in VET (Basque Country, Spain) and bilingualism (Catalonia, Spain). A 2018 project will explore building capacity to deliver higher level skills in Denmark.

The future of the highly successful Erasmus+ programme is put at risk by the UK's departure from the EU and every step must be taken to ensure that this programme or an equivalent for Wales is maintained post-exit in March 2019. Many discussions around the future of Erasmus+ have focussed on its Higher Education elements but the vocational Further Education opportunities are invaluable and should not be marginalised.

Other European initiatives around vocational education and training have also had a positive impact for Wales with ColegauCymru staff playing key roles in European

networks such as the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Network. In every country (European Union, European Economic Area and candidate countries), a Quality Assurance National Reference Point (NRP) brings together existing relevant bodies and involves the social partners and all relevant stakeholders at national and regional levels, in order to ensure the follow-up of initiatives. ColegauCymru acts as the NRP on behalf of the Welsh Government and has been successful in securing research funding of over £100,000 since 2015 for projects ranging from skills needs and offers in Wales' retail, tourism and hospitality industry to the role of skills in promoting economic resilience in comparable regions of Europe. Acting on behalf of the NRP, ColegauCymru experts have provided updates on developments in Wales and showcased examples of good practice e.g. Youth Engagement and Progression Framework across the EQAVET network. They have presented at annual network and Forum meetings to pan-European audiences, been involved in all Working Groups and provided Welsh case studies which have been published in the final reports.

ColegauCymru, in collaboration with UK EQF National Contact Points, has developed a website designed to help careers advisers, recruiters, university and college staff, learners and workers understand how skills and qualifications are recognised across Europe. The website is available in English and Welsh and can be accessed through via www.skillsforeurope.uk and www.sgiliauiewrop.cymru.

In September 2016 ColegauCymru hosted an EQAVET Peer Learning Activity on Placement data in vocational education programmes which was attended by delegates from across Europe. The event was very successful and both Cardiff and Vale College, as the venue, and Wales, as the host country, received positive feedback. Through our involvement in the EQAVET programme we have received invitations to take part in other projects and conferences which has significantly helped to raise awareness of Wales in the wider European community.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is an international benchmark, possibly the leading regional framework, in terms of use and reputation. From an international perspective, through the EQF's structures and processes, the qualifications system in the UK is more understandable and more accessible to people from overseas (including those outside Europe). Similarly, people in Wales can now compare Welsh levels of qualifications and Welsh qualifications types to those of other European countries. ColegauCymru's role as the National Contact Point (NCP) for the EQF ensures that Wales' voice continues to be heard at EQF Coordination group meetings in the UK and in Brussels. Many countries outside Europe wish to officially reference their National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to the EQF (for example, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong (SAR), India, United Arab Emirates). There is also interest from owners of international sectoral qualifications in having qualifications referenced to an EQF level. Even when the UK leaves the EU, there is still a case for maintaining a link to the EQF along with other "third countries"

Likewise, Cedefop (www.cedefop.europa.eu/en) works to strengthen European cooperation and provide the evidence on which to base European VET policy. Cedefop's added value is the high quality of its comparative analyses and expertise gathered through research and networking. Representatives from Wales have taken an active role in Cedefop, participating in a Policy Learning Forum (PLF) on Vocational training for the long-term unemployed in June 2017, for example. Information gained around approaches to addressing these issues, highly relevant in Wales, is extremely valuable and will be fed back to Welsh Government. ColegauCymru also draws on this information to inform responses to consultations and develop policy proposals. Links to partner countries are also further developed via events such as these. Following the June PLF, the potential of a visit to explore how Ireland has dealt with the issue of governance, planning and delivery of post-compulsory education is being explored, with a view to engaging Alun Davies AM, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language. This would provide valuable insight as the Welsh Government seeks to implement the recommendations of the Hazelkorn Review.

As the UK prepares to leave the EU, future participation in networks including Cedefop and EQAVET is a subject of debate. Wales has benefitted from participation in these pan-European initiatives, with the ability to learn from and showcase best practice. An initiative's value is partly determined by a country's willingness to engage and make it successful. If other countries have chosen not to engage greatly with European networks, they may well consider them to be of less value or insignificant. However, this is not objectively the case and ColegauCymru strongly advocates that Wales should continue to participate in European vocational and education networks to the same level as present, even if other nations of the UK do not choose to take advantage of the opportunities offered.

What lessons Wales can learn from similarly sized countries?

In terms of potential lessons from similarly-sized countries on skills and training, Cedefop produces a range of publications and resources, many on a country-specific basis which allow comparisons between the UK (including much Wales-level detail) and European countries of all sizes. Recent topics have included 'Apprenticeship-type schemes and structured work-based learning programmes', 'Skills forecasts' and 'Innovation in VET'.³

International benchmarking is a key Welsh Government priority for FE. As a result of our six years of Erasmus+ engagement we have excellent links with other European countries. As a bilingual country, there is much that Wales can learn from our multilingual European counterparts. In July 2017, ColegauCymru facilitated a Ministerial visit to the Basque Country to engage in learning lessons on innovation

³ See www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports [accessed 22-8-17].

and language development in VET (Vocational Education & Training) from a country similar to ours.

Catalonia is also similar to Wales in many respects and we have developed strong business and skills partnerships and multilingual policy development links with them as a result. ColegauCymru also maintains close working relationships with the relevant vocational groups in the Basque Country and continues to deepen and develop its networks with regions across Europe. The relationships could potentially be exploited to benefit business and the wider community if they were included in a strategic approach which encompassed FEIs.

Learning from others is crucial to sustaining success and growing our potential.

Conclusion

Further Education Institutions and ColegauCymru have much more to offer in terms of helping to promote Wales, whether that is in terms of support for skills, training and development around inward investment; ensuring the ongoing portability and understanding of qualifications from Wales in comparison with those of other countries; or building on our existing links with other countries, both in Europe and further afield.

To this end, the Welsh Government should:

- Ensure that Further Education is consistently included as a key partner in discussions on inward investment and other relevant economic developments and strategies.
- In partnership with ColegauCymru, maintain the current level of engagement and involvement with European agencies and partners around vocational education and training, benchmarks including EQF, and full participation in Erasmus+ programme.
- Commit to supporting and maintaining the relationships built between vocational education institutions and training providers as it progresses towards the establishment of the Tertiary Education and Research Commission.
- Improve communication and links between key partners/stakeholders to enable involvement and commitment to improving skills and prosperity to support the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. (The Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015).

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How FE colleges promote international studying in Wales

Dedicated international pages on college websites

International pages on FE college websites advertise courses that can be accessed by international students. These include A levels, NVQs, foundation degrees, HNCs, HNDs, English language courses and, in some cases, degree courses. Prospective applicants can apply online through college websites for courses or make contact with the college for more information. Links to the individual colleges' website pages are included in the Further Information section below.

Student World Online and other similar websites

Some colleges advertise on commercial websites that target international students and, for a fee, undertake some of the 'sifting' of potential students. These websites advertise worldwide study and are dominated by the HE sector. Here is a link to a dedicated page on Student World Online focussing on the FE colleges in Wales -

<http://www.studentworldonline.com/article/colleges-in-wales-flexible-lower-cost-study-for-1254/>

Overseas agents

FE colleges develop partnerships with overseas agents to recruit international students in their targeted countries. Agents charge a percentage commission for their services and may work for a number of educational organisations including universities so colleges have to work hard to build trusting relationships with agents. International Managers from the colleges will also visit schools overseas with their agents to have direct contact with international students.

Student recruitment fairs overseas

International Managers from the FE colleges may attend recruitment fairs overseas. Most of these are organised by British Council. They tend to be quite expensive so International Managers will also plan to visit schools/colleges with their agents on the same visit to make the visit worthwhile.

Partnerships with schools/colleges overseas

Some colleges have established strong partnerships with schools/colleges overseas for A level delivery, capacity building in VET education and leadership training for VET staff and principals. For example, Welsh college staff train staff from the target country to deliver AS levels for one-year in country and then the learners transfer to the college in Wales to complete A2s and progress to UK universities. For capacity building and leadership training,

delegations are sometimes trained overseas or they may visit Wales to undertake longer periods of training and observations.

Promoting a specialism

FE colleges with a USP such as Cardiff and Vale College's (CAVC) International Centre for Aerospace Training (ICAT) offer internationally recognised courses that can be undertaken in Cardiff and they offer online courses too.

Partnerships with universities in Wales

Some FE colleges have developed partnerships with universities in Wales and are able to offer progression routes to international students who are initially recruited to study A levels.

Summer and Winter schools in Wales

Some FE colleges have developed a programme of summer and winter schools (mainly for Chinese students). These schools combine English language learning, taster A level or vocational classes as well as cultural and social visits in Wales. The aim is to recruit students to study either A level or vocational courses in Wales.

Erasmus+

FE colleges in Wales have developed strong partnerships with vocational colleges across Europe through Erasmus+. The colleges in Europe source work placements for learners from Wales. FE colleges in Wales then offer reciprocal opportunities for learners from across Europe to undertake work placements in Wales or training periods in salons and workshops within the colleges in Wales.

Further Information

College	International pages on college website	Highly Trusted Sponsor
Bridgend College	n/a	NO
Cardiff and Vale College	http://www.cavc.ac.uk/en/international/introduction/	YES
Coleg Cambria	https://www.cambria.ac.uk/cambria-info/international/	YES
Coleg Sir Gâr	Recruits learners from Southern Ireland – has hosted UAE learners in the past.	YES
Coleg y Cymoedd	http://www.cymoedd.ac.uk/international/international-home.aspx?lang=en	YES
Coleg Gwent	http://www.coleggwent.ac.uk/international#submenu	YES
Gower College Swansea	http://www.gcs.ac.uk/international	YES
Grwp Llandrillo Menai	http://www.gllminternational.com/	YES
NPTC Group	https://www.nptcgroup.ac.uk/international/	YES
Pembrokeshire College	http://www.pembrokeshire.ac.uk/international-home/	YES
St David's Catholic College	https://www.stdavidscollege.ac.uk/international/	YES
The College Merthyr Tydfil	n/a	NO
Adult Learning Wales	n/a	NO

Ten out of the thirteen Further Education Institutes (FEIs) in Wales promote international studying in Wales and recruit international students.

In order for FE colleges to recruit internationally, the Home Office must approve them as Highly Trusted Sponsors and the colleges must comply with UK Visa and Immigration regulations.