

ColegauCymru

ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee's Inquiry into the Impact of Brexit on Higher and Further Education. ColegauCymru represents the 13¹ further education (FE) colleges and FE institutions in Wales² and exists to promote the public benefit of post compulsory education and learning.

Learner Outcomes and Employability

1.1) Ensuring that qualifications in Wales remain aligned to the European Qualifications Framework, which allows learners, learning providers and employers to compare qualifications between different national systems, is necessary for Wales' current and future citizens to play their part in the wider world. Portability of qualifications is key to employability both in terms of learners from Wales being able to work in other countries but also so that employers in Wales have confidence in qualifications of the workforce from across Europe and beyond.

1.2) Participation in the Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes has proved invaluable for learners in Wales. ColegauCymru has had further recent success in bidding for Erasmus+ funding, building on our established and solid track record in applying for, and project managing, Erasmus+ funds on behalf of the FEIs in Wales. Since the launch of Erasmus+ in 2014, ColegauCymru has secured over €3.2million of Erasmus+ funding through its pan Wales consortium applications for staff and vocational learner/apprentice mobility projects. In 2018, ColegauCymru has been successful in securing over €1.3 million of European funding for its learner mobility project:

All Wales Vocational Learner Mobility 2018/20

TOTALS

584 participants, 11 FE colleges, 1 employer, 19 subjects and 12 countries
= €1,383,808.00.

1.3) The wider impact of Erasmus+ funding is difficult to quantify. Anecdotal evidence from learners who have experienced working abroad under the scheme suggests increased confidence and the opening of horizons. In terms of employability, many learners have been offered paid employment at the businesses where they undertook their placement in settings ranging from catering to childcare to engineering.

1.4) It is vital that the same scheme or equivalent operates after the UK leaves the EU in March 2019. ColegauCymru's preference is for the UK to opt in and remain part of the Erasmus+ scheme at a UK level. However, if this is not possible, Wales must look at the practicalities of how to set up its own equivalent scheme, drawing on the expertise in this area that already exists within Wales.

1.5) Erasmus+ is not confined to learners but offers staff opportunities to learn from other countries with a focus on improving learner outcomes and the employability of learners, as well as areas of broader interest.

ColegauCymru recently secured funding of just over €40k in 2018 for a pan Wales staff mobility project to Helsinki, Finland to explore how the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) has worked with vocational colleges in the city on the design and implementation of an internationalisation strategy for vocational education and training (VET).

Examples of past staff mobility projects include:

- 2014-15: Senior leaders from FE colleges in Wales, Estyn and Welsh Government visit Finland to explore how literacy and numeracy are embedded in a vocational curriculum.
- 2015-16: A visit to Basque Country, Spain to explore innovation and VET. Tknika, a centre of innovation in San Sebastian hosted the visit. Since the staff visit,
- ColegauCymru's CEO and Alun Davies AM, then Minister for Welsh and Lifelong Learning returned to San Sebastian to look in more detail at the Basque Country's strategy for innovation in relation to VET.
- 2016-17: A visit to Catalonia, Spain to explore bilingualism and employer demand for language skills in that region. Representatives from ColegauCymru, the FE colleges, Welsh Government and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol also participated.
- 2017-18: A visit to Denmark to see what actions are in place to deliver higher-level skills in a vocational setting and how capacity building amongst teaching staff is undertaken to deliver these skills.

Financial Sustainability and Investment Opportunities

2.1) We attach a copy of the ColegauCymru research "Involvement of Welsh Further Education colleges and institutions in EU funding: An overview of the financial uptake" which gives more detail about how colleges in Wales have benefitted from European funding. This has been used to support and upskill the population of Wales through European programmes. These activities have made an important contribution to business and the economy, often in the most deprived areas of Wales. Over the past 10 years, FEIs in Wales have been involved in the delivery of EU funded projects to a

total value of almost £600m, both as project lead or project partner. The high degree of concern about the potential loss of this funding across the FE sector must not be underestimated.

2.2) ColegauCymru seeks assurances from the Welsh Government of continuity of funding for technical and vocational education including apprenticeships; an outline of the capital investment required by the Welsh Government to replace ERDF investment in buildings and; also how the recently announced £50m EU Transition Fund will allow employers to retrain or upskill workers via FE led in-work provision.

Research and Innovation Funding and Collaboration

3.1) Colleges are keen to continue and enhance collaboration with Higher Education institutions. Research takes place in many Further Education institutions, focused on the needs of employers and the local economy and it is vital that funding is available to support this activity.

3.2) Participation in European networks and collaborations such as Cedefop (which supports development of European vocational education and training (VET) policies and contributes to their implementation), EQAVET (a community of practice that promotes European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance in VET) and ECVET (the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training) remains vitally important if we are to be able to contribute to and learn from developments in other European countries.

Links:

[Involvement of Welsh Further Education colleges and institutions in EU funding](#)

[Cysylltiad colegau a sefydliadau Addysg Bellach Cymru â chyllid yr UE](#)