

Follow up to Inquiry into EU Funding Opportunities 2014-2020

Submission to NAW Enterprise & Business Committee

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Introduction

1. ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Enterprise and Business Committee's follow-up inquiry into EU funding opportunities 2014-2020. ColegauCymru represents the 14¹ further education (FE) colleges and FE institutions in Wales.² In 2011/12, there were 167,715 individual students attending college and 217,815 enrolments.³
2. Colleges have been working to maximise the benefits Wales gains from EU funding programmes for two decades. Colleges have participated in a range of programmes designed to promote the upskilling of the labour force in Wales and to reduce social exclusion. It is part of colleges' core business to promote Wales' economic revival through an enhanced skills base and the transfer of innovation and technology to business and industry.
3. Wales' position on the western periphery of the EU has enabled it to participate in some of the constituent programmes of **INTERREG** in its previous phases. The opportunity to participate in the 2014-2020 period in the Ireland-Wales Cross Border programme, the Atlantic Area programme and the North West Europe Transnational programme present further opportunities for Wales to benefit from these important programmes.
4. ColegauCymru itself has taken a lead role in supporting colleges to engage with these programmes, particularly the EU lifelong learning programmes such as **Leonardo** (and from 2014, **Erasmus+**). Our ambition is that colleges will significantly extend their engagement with these programmes in the 2014-2020 programming period. We have begun to work with colleges and other agencies across the UK to plan potential collaborative projects.
5. To this end, colleges in Wales and ColegauCymru played an important role in the high level **Celtic Nations EU Funding Seminar** with representation from Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland, which took place in Dundalk in Ireland in January 2014 and the follow-up event in March 2015. The seminar explored options for working together on cross-border projects relating to the Ireland-Wales Programme 2014-2020.
6. We are happy for this response to be placed in the public domain.

¹ The 14 include 10 FE corporations including St David's Catholic College; an FE institution – WEA YMCA Community College Cymru; and The College Merthyr Tydfil, Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion which are part of university groupings.

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

³ *Further Education, Work-Based Learning and Community Learning in Wales 2013/14 SDR 45/2015*, Welsh Government (March 2015).

The FE sector's experiences

Participation of the Welsh FE sector in the new EU Funding Programmes (Erasmus+, Ireland Wales Programme and Creative Europe)

7. ColegauCymru employed an International Coordinator in November 2010 to provide strategic assistance to colleges in Wales when applying for European funding and to encourage the participation of vocational education and training (VET) learners and staff in European funded projects.
8. A key responsibility of the role was to submit a centralised **Leonardo da Vinci** (EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007 – 2013) application on behalf of the FE colleges in Wales for apprentice and full time vocational learner mobility with participants undertaking 2-3 week work placements in Europe. This centralised application model succeeded in attracting over €450,000 to the FE sector in Wales between 2011 – 2013. In addition, a number of FE colleges submitted individual applications. Altogether, the total allocation of funding to the FE sector in Wales between 2011 – 2013 was just over €2.2m.
9. With the launch of Erasmus+ in 2014, ColegauCymru has continued to submit Wales-wide consortium applications for **Erasmus+** funding on behalf of the FE colleges in Wales. In addition, ColegauCymru provides guidance and support to colleges that wish to submit their own applications for funding, outside of the consortium bids.
10. In 2014, the first year of Erasmus+ (2014-2020), the FE sector in Wales secured total funding of €820,569.
11. In 2015, there was an increase in funding of 55% with a total project value of €1.2m with 11 out of the 14 FEIs taking part in either the ColegauCymru project or their own.
12. Appendix 1 shows details of the successful projects in Wales for Erasmus+ 2014 and 2015. The College Merthyr Tydfil was allocated over €600,000 for a Key Action 1 VET project that will enable over 270 vocational learners from construction, hair & beauty and business administration to undertake two week work placements in Germany. This was the third largest allocation of funding across the UK for a Key Action 1 VET project.
13. The **Ireland-Wales Programme 2014-2020** was officially launched in March 2015. FE colleges attended the event and projects are currently in the initial stages of development.

For example, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai's (GLLM) Food Technology Centre is a partner in a project called **Food Chains for Competitive Advantage** aimed at fostering innovation in SMEs. GLLM is also at the stage of compiling logic

tables with the Institute of Technology in Carlow, Republic of Ireland exploring knowledge transfer partnerships. This cross border partnership was re-ignited following GLLM's participation in a Celtic Nations Contact Seminar in March 2015. The contact seminar was supported by ColegauCymru and the West of Scotland's Colleges' Partnership.

14. Past success under **INTERREG** for the FE sector in Wales have included the following projects:

The **mCommunity** project led by Pembrokeshire College (£1.8m) which focusses on delivering learning through mobile technology to hard- to-reach groups and those most at risk of not engaging in education, training or employment. Outcomes from the project have been notably positive.

The **Vision** project led by Grŵp Llandrillio Menai (£1m) with the Institute of Technology Tallaght in Dublin, works to provide direct and practical assistance to businesses in moving a product or service design concept forward from the initial idea stage through to market. The project sees eligible local businesses and entrepreneurs receiving up to a maximum of £30,000 worth of expert support.

The **Rising Tide** project is a partnership involving Pembrokeshire College and others (£2.1m) which delivers vocational training programmes to provide progression routes for marginalised members of the community. The project also delivers community regeneration programmes to develop local events, activities and projects with local stakeholders in the development of maritime tourism and the promotion of local enterprise.

15. ColegauCymru is aware of the sector specific funding stream **Creative Europe** and notes that this is a specialist area that can be highlighted to colleges to explore as additional to their work in developing ESF projects.

Support & assistance from within Wales

16. ColegauCymru ensures that there is liaison with the Welsh Government staff who represent Wales on the UK Programme Board of **Erasmus+**. In 2014, there was a record number of ineligible applications under Key Action 1 (VET). This was linked to a lack of clarity in the Programme Guide issued by the European Commission relating to 'intermediary organisations'. This resulted in a large amount of unallocated funding in 2014 and the UK National Agency opening a second call for applications in November 2014. ColegauCymru raised its concerns with Welsh Government staff to feed in at Programme Board level.
17. The UK National Agency for Erasmus+ is shared by British Council and Ecorys. Ecorys manages the VET funding and ColegauCymru has a positive relationship with senior members of the Erasmus+ VET team at Ecorys.

Contact with the new EU Funding Ambassadors

18. ColegauCymru is aware of the appointment of EU Funding Ambassadors and their role in exploring synergies and opportunities for collaboration across the EU funding streams.

Maritime economy inquiry

19. The FE colleges in Wales are aware of the sectoral training needs of the maritime economy. Ioan Jenkins, Development Director Wales for Tidal Lagoon Power was invited to address delegates at ColegauCymru's Annual Conference in May 2015.

Responses to Recommendations

20. Below we address those specific recommendations contained in the Committee's report as requested by the Committee Clerk.

Recommendation 3

Establish a central contact point for organisations within Wales and for those outside Wales looking for Welsh partners.

21. ColegauCymru has been successful with Erasmus+ as it provides a central point of contact for the FE colleges in Wales for Erasmus+. It has a network of European contacts within mobility departments in regional governments (Catalunya, Basque Country, Balearics, Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany) as well as with individual staff in vocational colleges in Europe. ColegauCymru also acts as a central point of contact for European partners looking for Welsh partners disseminating and acting on project ideas that are sent via the Wales Brussels office to Wales.

Recommendation 4

Develop specialist, tailored support for the youth, education and transport sectors along the lines of the MEDIA Antenna model for the cultural sector.

22. ColegauCymru provides support to the further education colleges in Wales through its centralised international function. CoelgauCymru has made an initial contact with MEDIA Antenna model to ensure that it continually improves the support that it offers to its members.

Recommendation 5

Cultivate partnerships between stakeholders across the higher and further education sectors, business and the third sector to share expertise, resources and good practice.

23. Following discussions with the UK national agency, ColegauCymru is prioritising the participation of apprentices and the engagement of SMEs as sending organisations in its 2016 application for Erasmus+ (VET) funding.
24. ColegauCymru acts for the Welsh Government as the National Contact Point (NCP) in Wales for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET). ColegauCymru has hosted a series of events at colleges across Wales to introduce these EU qualifications tools to tutors and managers. We are also hosting a workshop in Cardiff for careers advisors from across Wales on 26 November 2015.
25. ColegauCymru set up a Wales Steering Group to advise the National Contact/Coordination Points for Wales on how the impact of the EU VET programmes can be maximised for the benefit of learners, employers, education providers and other bodies. This Group now includes the Qualifications and Careers Manager of The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). Through this contact, we hope to be able to address the issue raised by the CITB in giving evidence to the Enterprise & Business Committee⁴ on the accessibility of the programmes to SMEs.

Recommendation 6

Review the representation in Wales House in Brussels to address current gaps, notably how its services can be accessed by businesses, further education, the third sector and the creative and cultural sectors.

26. ColegauCymru has explored options for addressing gaps in representation in Wales House in Brussels. ColegauCymru has decided to build on its current relationship with the Head of Economic Development Policy as the immediate costs of basing an FE representative in Wales House cannot be funded.

Recommendation 9

Bring together the further and higher education sectors and national agencies such as British Council, Ecorys and organisations such as

⁴ See issue raised by CITB in para 46. of Enterprise & Business Committee report on *EU Funding opportunities 2014-2020* (July 2014)

ECTARC to develop synergies, share best practice, and build links to access separate strands of funding and engage with the centrally run programmes within the European Commission.

27. The UK national agency manages a Country Advisory Group (Wales) for Erasmus+. These meetings take place twice a year and the membership comprises ColegauCymru, Hefcw, Welsh Government, Disability Wales, TUC, Connect Cymru, Estyn, Cardiff City Council (international schools linking), Routes into Languages and Niace. There is scope, with assistance, to widen the remit of this group to explore other strands of funding other than Erasmus+.

Recommendation 10

Monitor trends in student mobility, including British Council data on its Erasmus+ and youth programmes, and ensure the outcomes and impact of engagement and participation by the youth sector are systematically captured.

28. ColegauCymru is currently focused on developing its work with vocational/work based learners.

Appendix: Successful Erasmus+ projects 2014 and 2015

Organisation	2014 €	2015 €
The College Merthyr Tydfil		612,472
Coleg Cambria	174,444	322,810
Coleg Gwent	75,292	95,060
Gower College Swansea	235,938	
Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (KA1)	12,250	
Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (KA2)	298,795	
ColegauCymru (learner)		221,574
ColegauCymru (staff)	23,850	18,375
TOTAL	820,569	1,270,291