



# Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Consultation

## Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

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## Introduction

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ColegauCymru is a post-compulsory education charity; we promote the public benefit of post-compulsory education and learning. We also convene the further education (FE) Principals' Forum, which represents Further Education colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales. ColegauCymru also undertakes research, policy development and provides practical support to FE colleges in Wales, including on work-based learning (WBL) which is a key part of FE college activity.

## Overview

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A detailed analysis of the basis of the ColegauCymru public policy position and its specific recommendations for the priorities of the current government can be found in *Further Education: Enabling Renewal and Helping to Build Better Citizenship, Occupations and Business Communities in Wales*.<sup>1</sup> This research is based on the work of internationally recognised experts and is a demonstration of our commitment to ensuring that the provision of technical and vocational education is based on international best practice and collaboration. ColegauCymru is a member of the World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics (wfc.org) and acts as a reference point for Welsh Government on international skills and qualifications.

**Sport:** ColegauCymru promotes Sport and Active Wellbeing across the network of 13 FE colleges and works in partnership with Sport Wales in developing both recreational and competitive sports programmes. ColegauCymru has engaged with FE colleges in providing activity for over 24,000 learners since 2014. Supported by Sport Wales, funding has been primarily aimed at increasing participation, tackling inequality and increasing volunteering. Wider development work has taken place, creating improved delivery models, better insight and monitoring, and strategic level development across the FE sector.

**International:** ColegauCymru supports Wales's FE colleges in providing international enrichment opportunities for learners and professional development experiences overseas for staff. These are funded by the legacy Erasmus+ programmes, the UK Government's Turing Scheme and the forthcoming Welsh Government International Learning Exchange Programme. The FE colleges also provide transnational education opportunities and engage in international commercial activities such as student recruitment and contract work overseas.

**Welsh Language:** ColegauCymru works with Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to promote the delivery of Welsh Language teaching and learning in colleges and maintain the Cymraeg Gwaith Addysg Bellach programme that provides language tuition to both teaching and support staff across the sector.

<sup>1</sup> John Buchanan et al., *Enabling Renewal: Further Education and Building Better Citizenship, Occupations and Business Communities in Wales*, ColegauCymru, 2021, available at: <https://www.colleges.wales/image/publications/briefings/Policy%20Asks%20Senedd%20Elections%202021/Eng/Theme%204%20brief.pdf>

## **Priorities for the Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations**

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### **1. What is the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your sector, and what further support is needed from the Welsh and UK Governments both to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and enable the post-pandemic recovery?**

#### **International Exchange**

1.1 One of the main impacts of the pandemic is that it has had an adverse impact on international exchange schemes with vocational learners from further education colleges unable to use much of the final years of Erasmus+ exchange funding for placements in Europe. Staff mobility visits to learn from other European countries have been similarly affected. European funders responded by extending the deadline for the funding but ongoing travel restrictions and uncertainty means that it will still be challenging to use the funding within the timescale.

1.2 The UK Government Turing Scheme and the Welsh Government International Learning Exchange (ILE) programme are welcome but, as yet, untested replacements for Erasmus+. Details are still being finalised but the Turing Scheme does not include funding for staff, adult learner or youth exchanges. The Welsh Government ILE has a broader remit but there is still work to be done to ensure that youth services are fully included and able to benefit from exchange opportunities. Likewise, opportunities for adult learners need to be built into replacements for Erasmus+.

1.3 The Welsh Government has committed to its scheme until 2026 which is positive. However, it would be helpful if the UK Government would commit to their international exchange scheme over the longer term. At present, the Turing Scheme runs for the 2021-22 academic year only and is subject to spending reviews.

#### **Sport and Active Wellbeing**

1.4 As a result of Covid-19, learners across FE institutions have missed out on volunteering and employment opportunities as a means of strengthening their knowledge, learning and experiences. For example, many learners had expected to be gaining work experience in primary schools during a typical year's course. The Welsh Government should take account of this and think about how this issue can be addressed when developing or updating health and physical activity strategies around Covid recovery. FE learners offer a pool of talent across Wales who can support a range of physical activity interventions benefitting both sides.

## **2. What issues should the committee prioritise in planning our work programme for the immediate and longer term?**

### **Cymraeg 2050**

2.1 The legacy report of the previous Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee highlighted the need for its successor Committee to assess progress against targets in the Cymraeg 2050 strategy, prioritising the targets for Welsh medium teachers and education.<sup>2</sup>

2.2 ColegauCymru is supportive of this suggestion. However, focusing on the targets set for primary and secondary teachers should be part of a wider focus on bilingual and Welsh medium teaching across the whole of the education system, including Further Education.

2.3 The Cymraeg Gwaith scheme, for instance, has had a positive impact on upskilling staff in FE to develop their Welsh language skills to be able to deliver at least part of their teaching in Welsh. However, funding is only granted on an annual basis and this is in line with financial years (April to March), rather than academic years, which is problematic. A Committee inquiry could consider how improvements could be made to the schemes and support provided to the education sector to enable more lecturers or teachers to be able to deliver through the medium of Welsh.

2.4 Similarly, the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's vision for the further education sector – and reflected in the Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh-medium Action Plan – is to ensure that the Welsh language is accessible to all, utilising a skills development model to increase levels of awareness, understanding, confidence and fluency, which will lead to the upskilling of everyone in the sector. The extent to which progress has been made, especially on the base levels of the pyramid – awareness and understanding – should be part of a Committee inquiry into progress on Cymraeg 2050 more broadly. Key to this will be an investigation of whether the Coleg actually has sufficient funding to achieve this element of its vision and support the skills development model.

2.5 Such an inquiry might benefit from joint sessions with the Children, Young People and Education Committee.

### **Successors to the highly successful Erasmus+ Scheme**

2.6 Over the longer term, the Committee might wish to consider the future of international exchange schemes, including the Welsh Government International Learning Exchange and the UK Government Turing Scheme, and how these might need to adapt to a post-Covid, post-Brexit landscape. It will be important to consider any gaps in replacement provision for exchange to make sure that all learners and young people have a genuine opportunity to benefit. It will also be helpful at that time to consider whether European countries have introduced any reciprocal barriers to those the UK Government now has in place for European learners seeking to come to the UK on short-term work placements.

<sup>2</sup> Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, *Fifth Senedd Legacy Report*, Senedd, March 2021, page 23-24. Available at: <https://senedd.wales/media/yuri41px/cr-ld14317-e.pdf>

### **3. How does Brexit and the new UK-EU relationship affect you or your organisation? What support have you received to respond to the changes? What further support, if any, is needed from Welsh and UK Governments?**

#### **International Exchange and Collaboration**

##### *Exchange*

3.1 The UK's departure from the European Union has placed additional barriers to learners from European countries undertaking short-term work placements in Wales (and the UK more broadly). There is the potential for European countries to put in place reciprocal barriers – for example learners from Europe now face a £244 application fee for a T5 visa, along with other onerous criteria that are disproportionate for short-term work placements (see: <https://www.gov.uk/youth-mobility>).

3.2 Following correspondence with the Home Office, it was confirmed that migrants who are entering the UK for six months or less are not required to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge. This includes students who are here on a short-term visa. However, in neither of the two responses received by ColegauCymru from the Home Office was the question of whether there was any further guidance regarding the EU implementing control measures for UK learners undertaking Erasmus+ and future Turing Scheme work placements within Europe addressed. UK Government updates about any discussions on this issue, or Welsh Government inquiries in any discussions with relevant UK departments or ministers, would be helpful.

##### *Collaboration*

3.3 On related note, ColegauCymru (along with the other UK National Contact Points (NCPs)) asserts that the UK should maintain the referencing relationship with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF relationship benefits UK employees and UK employers, as well as benefitting EU-based citizens seeking work in the UK. The EQF helps employers from one country know how qualifications from another compare with those with which they are familiar. ColegauCymru has worked with Welsh Government to support the development and implementation of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) which links to the EQF. The CQFW is an important element in the qualifications system in Wales in making qualifications more accessible and supporting the development of lifelong learning.

3.4 This ability to compare qualifications, including those specifically used in Wales, could be important when employers are deciding whether to consider offering work to someone who holds an unfamiliar qualification – saving time for UK employers recruiting from the EU and helping UK citizens compete for jobs in the EU. It is crucial to recognise that this works in both directions – for UK workers going to Europe and European workers coming to the UK (and beyond given the wider understanding of the EQF) - and to the benefit of employers and qualification holders.

**Ymateb gan Colegau Cymru / Response from Colleges Wales**

3.5 A joint letter from the four NCPs was sent to UK Government concerning this and the other benefits of maintaining alignment with the EQF on 20 July 2021. It would be helpful if the ongoing alignment could be confirmed by UK Government and for the Welsh Government to advocate for this.

3.6 The EQF is not the only important focus of collaboration that has been developed with European counterparts. Wales's participation in a number of important and useful networks has been lost or put in jeopardy by Brexit. All avenues should be explored to maintain and extend the excellent networks and contacts built up over more than ten years, including with the National Coordination Points (NCPs), European Qualifications Framework (EQF), European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and others. This is vital to ensuring that the provision of technical and vocational education is based on international best practice and collaboration.

3.7 ColegauCymru looks forward to supporting the work of the Committee over the coming months and years.

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