


[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Inquiry into EU funding opportunities 2014-2020](#)

Evidence from Welsh Local Government Association – EUO 17



**WLGA written submission to the
National Assembly for Wales'
Enterprise and Business
Committee Inquiry into EU
Funding opportunities 2014-
2020**

10th February 2014



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INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this timely inquiry into wider EU Funding opportunities for Wales for the 2014-2020 programming period. We hope that the inquiry will contribute to raising awareness and understanding of the opportunities available to Wales from all EU funding programmes for the next 7 years and lead to increasing Wales' participation in all programmes.

Role of Local Authorities in relation to EU Funding Programmes

4. Local Government is a key player both in the current round of EU funding programmes and in preparing for the new round of programmes for 2014-2020.
5. Although the majority of local authorities have tended to concentrate attention on maximising EU funding opportunities from the Structural Fund Programmes and the Rural Development Plan, there are a few who also get engaged in much broader EU activities via EU supported initiatives such as Europe Direct and Eurodesk. Further, many schools and youth services are involved in EU Education and Lifelong Learning programmes. In addition some local authorities actively participate in initiatives that promote international links via funding from the British Council.
6. As mentioned above, local authorities in Wales have tended to concentrate efforts on maximising funds from both the EU Structural Fund Programmes and the Rural Development Plan as these programmes have seemingly offered the best opportunities for local authorities to access European funding. Most local authorities employ at least one European Officer, although the number of officers employed does vary from authority to authority. Authorities in the West Wales and the Valleys Convergence area employ more officers due to the larger scale of funding available to them under the Structural Fund Programmes.

7. The source of funding for these roles tends to determine the nature of the roles. For example, some European Officers are funded by the Structural Funds, others by the Rural Development Plan, and others by core funding from the local authority's budget. Those funded by core budgets tend to have wider responsibilities. For example, a number also deal with wider external funding that is available to the authority and have more flexibility to consider wider sources of both EU and domestic funding which could be relevant to a number of different departments across their authorities.
8. There are a number of local authorities that also provide much broader support to EU engagement and participation that does not purely focus on accessing EU monies. This includes providing:
 - support to communities for town twinning
 - general information about the EU
 - services that facilitate networking and the identification of EU partners
 - specific advice and support to schools and youth organisations
 - advice on EU legislation
 - support for international activities

Many of the above activities are done via contractual agreements that some local authorities have with the European Commission to deliver Europe Direct and Eurodesk services.

Role of the WLGA European Team

9. The WLGA European Team provides support and advice to local authorities on all aspects of their European work. The team comprises of a Team Manager and Policy Officer for Europe and Regeneration based in the WLGA Cardiff Office, and a European Affairs Manager and European Policy and Communication Officer based in the WLGA Brussels Office. The team provides the following services to local authorities:
 - facilitates, supports, advices and promotes local government involvement in EU Funding Programmes;
 - lobbies for and promotes the key role of local government in delivering programmes and policy on the ground;
 - gathers intelligence on legislative and policy proposals and the EU policy making process to keep local government informed;
 - provides information on funding schemes and opportunities and circulates partner searches on a weekly basis to all local authorities;
 - produces a fortnightly e-bulletin for local authorities that provides a summary overview of key EU policy developments, funding opportunities, consultations and events;

- publishes a quarterly newsletter for local authorities, including more in-depth analysis of key policy areas, as well as news and information from the Brussels Office;
- supports partnership working across European local government, and works closely with other Brussels-based offices of local government associations from across Europe;
- supports Welsh Local Authority Members of the Committee of the Regions, Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions;
- facilitates and supports local authority delegation visits to Brussels and other parts of the EU and
- works closely with representatives from other Welsh institutions in Wales House in Brussels (Welsh Government, National Assembly for Wales and Higher Education Wales).

We are currently finalising a WLGA Funding Guide for all EU Funding Programmes for 2014-2020, which will be available on-line on our website by the middle of February.

Maximising Opportunities for Wales from 2014-2020 EU Funding Programmes

We believe that Wales could considerably improve its approach to maximising all the opportunities available from all EU Funding Programmes for 2014-2020 as follows:

10. **Enabling joint working across organisations and sectors.** We would encourage much more joint working across organisations and sectors in Wales in order to maximise the opportunities available from all EU Funding Programmes. It is disappointing, for example, that there was no consultation or engagement with key partners in the development and delivery of the Welsh Government's EU Strategy.
11. **Regional Supporting Arrangements.** We are keen to see the establishment of Regional Specialist Teams consisting of all key partners for the 2014-2020 EU Funding Programming Period (Key Welsh Government Departments: DfES, DEST, Sustainable Futures, Local Government & Communities; Local Government; WCVA and the Higher and Further Education sectors). This would enable more effective cross-sector working in order to maximise the impact, outputs and outcomes from the programmes. It would also promote the integration of the different funds thus enabling a more holistic approach to activities and interventions to be funded. We would envisage the following as some of the key functions for these teams:
 - Providing technical and administrative support for collaborative working in preparation for the new European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds and the Territorial Cooperation Programmes and facilitate activities in relation to

wider EU themed funding programmes such as HORIZON 2020, Connecting Europe Facility, ERASMUS+ and others.

- Provide dedicated advice and guidance to potential applicants on the application processes and partner search facilities.
- Helping to engage regional, sub-regional and local partners and stakeholders in the development of projects.
- Facilitate, coordinate and support partnership and network building and brokering across the region.
- Promoting awareness and understanding of the ESI, European Territorial Cooperation Programmes and wider EU themed programmes, their regulations and requirements and potential sources of match funding.

We are currently exploring the potential and opportunities of such an arrangement with WEFO and other key partners. In our view one of the main opportunities of such an arrangement is that it would enable an integrated approach to be adopted for the delivery of all European Funds at a regional, sub-regional and local level throughout Wales for the 2014-2020 programming period. Further, it would significantly improve the awareness and understanding of all EU Funding opportunities available to Wales.

12. **Promoting benefits of transnational working.** There needs to be a much greater focus on raising awareness and understanding of the benefits of transnational working. This could be done by showcasing examples of good practice. Further, by relating transnational activity to key policies and objectives of local authorities and other organisations the added value of transnational activity can be demonstrated, for example, through initiatives that seek sustainable solutions to common issues and challenges faced by local communities across EU nations and regions such as climate change and demographic changes.

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