



Inquiry into EU Funding Opportunities 2014-2020

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Introduction

1. ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Enterprise and Business Committee's inquiry into EU funding opportunities 2014-2020. ColegauCymru represents the 15¹ further education (FE) colleges and FE institutions in Wales.² In 2011/12, there were 214,850 individual students attending college and 229,615 enrolments.³
2. Colleges have been engaged in maximising 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. This is part of colleges' core business to promote Wales's economic revival through an enhanced skills base and through 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 INTERREG V, the Ireland-Wales Cross Border programme, the Atlantic Area programme and the North West Europe Transnational programme presents a further chance for Wales to benefit from these important programmes.
4. ColegauCymru itself has taken a leadership role in helping 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 under INTERREG.
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 on 29th and 30th January 2014. The seminar explored options for working together on cross-border projects relating to the INTERREG programmes. Follow up work from that seminar will feed into colleges' own plans to engage with these important EU funding programmes in the 2014-2020 programming period.
6. ColegauCymru would welcome the opportunity to give further evidence to the committee in person. We are happy for this response to be placed in the public domain.

¹ The 15 include 10 FE corporations including St David's Catholic College; the two FE institutions - WEA Cymru and YMCA Community College; 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 2011/12 SDR 48/2013*, Welsh Government (March 2013).

Responses to questions from the Committee

a). Colleges' engagement in EU Lifelong Learning & INTERREG programme

7. Colleges have engaged extensively with EU Lifelong Learning and the INTERREG programme. Since 2011, **41 EU lifelong learning projects** (including those organised by ColegauCymru) at 11 colleges in Wales have been funded, **gaining a total project income of £2.3m.**
8. To provide strategic assistance to colleges in Wales, ColegauCymru employed an International Coordinator in November 2010 to encourage participation of Vocational Education and Training learners and staff in European funded projects. The main focus was/is to submit a centralised **Leonardo da Vinci** 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.
9. ColegauCymru submits a centralised bid for funding on behalf of the FE colleges in Wales on an annual basis and works with a variety of European partners to make the bid a success. Some European partners are sourced from ColegauCymru's network of European links and others are partners with whom the colleges have previously worked but apply for funding via the ColegauCymru application.
10. ColegauCymru has established long term contacts since November 2010 with the mobility departments in the regional government of Catalunya and with the International Director of Tknika in the Basque Country, Spain (funded by the Basque Government). Some of the FE colleges in Wales have established strong relationships with vocational colleges in these areas through ColegauCymru's mobility project – Coleg y Cymoedd (IES Don Bosco, Basque Country and EHTB, Barcelona); NPTC Group (IES La Garrotxa, Catalunya).

Colleges have engaged in the **Ireland-Wales 2007-2013 Programme** and are working hard to make the most of the 2014-2020 programmes. In the Ireland-Wales programme three projects are worth highlighting:

- 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 other partners (£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.

b). The degree of support available to facilitate successful participation

11. Ecorys, the national agency for Leonardo funding up until 2013, is a reliable source of support for mobility applications. Under the 2007–2013 Lifelong Learning Programme, Ecorys managed the Wales Advisory Group which met three times a year. Statistics referring to Wales' participation in all strands of the Lifelong Learning Programme was reported and discussed at the group. The group consisted of organisations that accessed, or had the potential to access, 2013 Lifelong Learning Programme funding as well as representation from Welsh Government which regularly updated the group on its policies and priority areas. It is intended that this group will continue its coordination role under the Erasmus+ programme.

c). Challenges to successful participation (incl. funding/resourcing)

12. Leonardo da Vinci funding has enabled participants to undertake fully funded work placements in Europe. Travel, subsistence and language preparation have all been funded through the grant that has been obtained from Leonardo da Vinci. It appears (confirmation from Ecorys is still being sought) that subsistence rates for 2014-2020 under the Erasmus+ programme may be lower than the 2007–2013 rates. The management fee has also been reduced and there is no funding available for language and cultural preparation of the participants. Thus, whilst there has been an increase in the overall budget for Erasmus+, it appears that funding rates within the different programmes have decreased. These changes could affect participation levels.
13. The higher intervention rates available for INTERREG and some of its related programmes (c.75%) mean that project sponsors are more able to get a potentially beneficial project off the ground. The multinational nature of the collaborations can sometimes be a challenge to organise and sustain logistically, but these challenges have generally not turned out to be insurmountable.

d). Benefits/Value gained from engagement in EU initiatives

14. European funding enables learners from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds to participate in enriching opportunities overseas. ColegauCymru has primarily focused on opportunities for vocational and work based learners to undertake short periods of work experience with commercial organisations in Europe through Leonardo da Vinci funding.
15. **Benefits to Wales have included:** improvement of technical skills and language skills for students, enhancement of 'soft skills' (teamworking, problem solving, resilience, flexibility, understanding and tolerance of other work and social cultures), recognition of the learning that has taken place during the work placement in Europe through the Europass initiative and through the promotion of the principles of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

e). Opportunities for the 2014-2020 programming period

16. ColegauCymru will continue to submit an application for work placement mobility through Erasmus+ for vocational learners and apprentices on an annual basis and will also continue its support for colleges wishing to submit their own applications for funding. ColegauCymru will also submit an application in 2014 for staff mobility. The destination country is Finland and the target group of staff are responsible for improving teaching and learning within colleges in Wales and who participate in the ColegauCymru Teaching and Learning Network. We are working to ensure that this project will yield benefits for learners in Wales and in our partner regions.
17. Discussions are also underway with the Director of Bilingualism at ColegauCymru and the Director of Sgiliaith (an agency funded to develop Welsh language vocational skills) to organise staff mobility to either the Basque Country or Catalunya for the colleges' Bilingual Champions to explore different approaches to bilingual teaching and learning.

f). Potential help from Welsh Government and other agencies

18. The ColegauCymru International Coordinator's role was initially funded by the Welsh Government for 12 months (November 2010 – October 2011) and the International Coordinator's work was monitored regularly by Welsh Government officials. The International Coordinator role since November 2011 has been funded by ColegauCymru and the job responsibilities are wider than the initial Welsh Government remit.
19. ColegauCymru works with Welsh Government officials on European funding, with officials constructively participating in the sector's European Funding Managers' Network and other fora.

Annex: Leonardo da Vinci funding through ColegauCymru since Nov 2010

Application date	Number of colleges	Number of participants	Number of apprentices	Number of IVET	Number of curriculum areas	Number of European countries	Number of host partners in Europe	Amount of funding (Euro)
February 2011	8	28	28	0	5	3	8	92,000
February 2012	11	63	45	22	8	8	18	215, 996.75
February 2013	7	47	18	29	10	5	18	154, 870.40
TOTAL FUNDING TO DATE (EUROS)								462, 867.15
March 2014 - expressions of interest received from FE colleges but not submitted yet	10	160	tbc	tbc	14	14	30+	250,000+ (estimated figure)