

NAfW Inquiry into EU funding opportunities 2014-2020

Joint Response:

Welsh Higher Education Brussels (WHEB) and Higher Education Wales (HEW)

1. About WHEB and HEW

Welsh Higher Education Brussels (WHEB) serves to promote the interests of the Welsh Higher Education sector in Europe by facilitating stronger relationships between Welsh universities, the institutions of the European Union and other regional and academic players based in Brussels. WHEB is funded by all eight Welsh universities as well as the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the University of Wales Registry. The office is supported by and strategically aligned to Higher Education Wales (HEW).

Higher Education Wales (HEW) represents the interests of universities in Wales and is a National Council of Universities UK (UUK). HEW's membership encompasses the Vice-Chancellors of all the universities in Wales, and the Director of the Open University in Wales.

2. Introduction

The HE sector welcomes the Enterprise and Business Committee's inquiry into this diverse range of EU funding opportunities, many of which are integral to Welsh universities' strategic planning over the next seven years. The sector currently accesses a wide range of EU schemes in support of projects relating not only to research, but also to high-quality teaching, informed learning, and the stimulation of enterprise and innovation. EU funding is therefore considered to be of great strategic interest. Below are some key messages. Further detail on engagement with each programme is set out in Section 3.

Key Messages

- Of the programmes within scope, Erasmus+ and INTERREG are strategically very important for Welsh universities' international mobility/funding strategies. Both will be key priorities for the majority of Welsh universities from 2014-2020.
- There has been some engagement within the sector with the predecessor programmes to Creative Europe and COSME. Both will become increasingly relevant as universities look for new and alternative funding streams in future.
- EU funding for Research and Innovation (Horizon2020, formerly FP7) and the domestically managed EU Structural Funds - both out of the scope of this inquiry - continue to provide the largest source of EU investment to Welsh universities. That said, universities will be keen to combine alternative EU funding opportunities to leverage more research and innovation funding going forward.

Programme Specific Information

3.1 Erasmus+

General Remarks

The HE sector in Wales has and continues to place a strong emphasis on internationalisation and student mobility. Welsh universities are supportive of the Welsh and UK Government's strategies for student mobility. Universities in Wales welcomed the commitment to internationalisation set out in the Welsh Government's [Policy Statement on Higher Education](#) (June 2013). This is reinforced at UK level by the [UK Strategy for Outward Mobility](#) (December 2013).

Erasmus+ will be a key means of implementing internationalisation strategies going forward. Increasing participation in the new programme will not be limited to Key Action 1 (Learning Mobility of Individuals). Key Action 2 (The development of Strategic Partnerships and Knowledge Alliances) will also be a target for institutions keen to develop relationships with enterprises. The news that British Council Wales has been appointed the UK National Agency for Erasmus+ has boosted the sector's aspirations for a strategic approach to the new programme across Wales.

There is a general consensus that the predecessor programmes to Erasmus+ (Lifelong Learning Programme, Erasmus Mundus and Tempus) contributed significantly to strengthening the international dimension of the classroom and encouraging student and staff mobility across Wales' universities. As well as enhancing student experience, they enabled universities to form valuable partnerships across the EU leading to a variety of joint activities. Other benefits include providing opportunities for curriculum development, raising the profile of Welsh universities internationally, and enhancing skills and employability. A Wales-wide commitment to increasing skills and employability is set out in the [Agreement on skills and Employability](#) jointly developed by HEFCW, HEW, CBI Wales and NUS Wales in 2012.

3.1.1 Lifelong Learning Programme

Given its focus on the HE sector, the Erasmus Programme has been the priority funding stream for universities within the Lifelong Learning Programme. All Welsh universities now have dedicated officers responsible for Erasmus+ and its predecessor schemes based within their International Offices.

Cardiff University continues to be one of the largest participants in the Erasmus Programme in the UK. Erasmus has been embedded in the institution since its inception in 1987. The University's commitment is demonstrated by the target which has been set to increase outward student mobility to 17% of graduating students by 2017. Similarly, Aberystwyth University first made explicit its commitment to broadening and deepening European collaborations in support of teaching and learning in 1990 by establishing a team with a focus on Erasmus. Swansea University has been actively involved on an annual basis since the late 1990s. Glyndwr University and the University of South Wales have been active participants of the Erasmus Programme for 20 and 12 years respectively.

Wales has also benefitted from the Leonardo da Vinci strand of the Lifelong Learning Programme. Through linking up with the European Centre for Training and Regional Co-operation ([ECTARC](#))'s Leonardo funded [Outward Programme](#), Graduate Opportunities Wales (GO Wales) was able to offer Welsh graduates the opportunity to develop their employment opportunities by participating in a 13

week programme of language and work experience directly connected to their studies in Spain, France, Germany or Italy.

3.1.2 Erasmus Mundus

Cardiff Metropolitan University has an outstanding track record for participation in Erasmus Mundus. The university is a partner in twelve projects and is the only institution in the UK to coordinate 6 Erasmus Mundus projects. Global partnerships cover Africa, Asia, Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America, South America and the Western Balkans.

In 2012, Cardiff University's School of Planning and Geography won funding through Erasmus Mundus to run a joint Masters programme with universities in Sweden and the Netherlands. Part of PLANET Europe, it is the first programme in Cardiff to be successful in a bid for support from Erasmus Mundus scheme, which will provide a number of scholarships for the programme over a five-year period. The university is now looking to increase these activities under Erasmus+, with a number of Schools actively considering how they can engage with this important initiative. Having set up a number of joint degree programmes under Erasmus Mundus, the University of South Wales also hopes to access further funding for partnerships under the new Erasmus+.

As well as Masters Degrees, Welsh universities have also engaged in joint doctoral programmes through Erasmus Mundus. Bangor University, for example, is a partner in the Forest and Nature for Society ([FONASO](#)) programme which is offered alongside the University of Copenhagen, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Dresden University of Technology, the University of Gottingen, AgroParisTech and the University of Padova.

3.1.3 Tempus Programme

As coordinator of the [Leadership in Higher Education Management project](#), Cardiff Metropolitan University has enjoyed active participation in the Tempus Programme. The project supports existing, potential and aspiring leaders and includes partners from Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, Italy and Greece. For Cardiff Metropolitan:

'The Life Long Learning Programme, TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus Actions 2 and 3 have led to useful partnerships across Europe and in the Neighbourhood Countries'.

3.2 INTERREG

General Remarks

Most Welsh universities have participated in the INTERREG Programme. Those that have engaged significantly agree that it has enabled them to develop extensive networks of international contacts. The access to European experts has led to other collaborative research opportunities and potential grant capture, and in some cases this has translated into other important activities e.g. student recruitment, mobility exchange. As a result, most of the Welsh universities consulted for this response identified INTERREG as a feature of their EU funding plans for the 2014-2020 funding period.

Partner organisations tend to depend on the links individual academics and departments have developed through their networking activities. Universities very often work with the same partners but this will depend upon the type of activity to be delivered. All Welsh universities have a network of well established partners both within and outside of Wales, the UK and Europe.

3.2.1 Ireland-Wales Programme

Aberystwyth University has engaged with the Ireland-Wales Programme exclusively since the early 1990s. In the 2007-13 programme, the university was involved in three projects, [Smart Coasts](#) (AU lead partner), Sustainable Learning Networks Ireland Wales ([SLNIW](#)) and Shellfish Productivity in the Irish Sea ([SUSFISH](#)). Collectively, these three projects have a cumulative project value (across all partners) of £24.5mn.

Swansea University has been actively engaged in the Ireland-Wales Programme since 2008, and are involved in 5 projects: The Wales Ireland Network for Photovoltaic Technologies ([WIN-IPT](#)), the Celtic Alliance for Nanohealth ([CAN](#)), Managing the Opportunities and Detrimental Impacts of Jellyfish in the Irish Sea ([ECOJEL](#)), The Integrated Management of Forest Pests Addressing Climate Trends ([IMPACT](#)) and they are also a partner alongside Aberystwyth in SUSFISH (see above). The Ireland-Wales Programme alone is worth over £1.6mn to the university.

Being located in the 'West Wales and the Valleys' region, Bangor University has also participated in the Ireland-Wales Programme. The Green Innovation Future Technologies ([GIFT](#)) project, a partnership between Bangor University, the Waterford Institute of Technology and University College Dublin, was launched in 2011 with the aim of establishing a cross border forum for growing a sustainable "green economy" in the INTERREG regions of Wales and Ireland.

Cardiff University's participation in the Ireland-Wales Programme has been very limited due to being outside the programme area. This is also true of the University of South Wales (USW). However, the universities falling outside the programme are encouraged that organisations outside the immediate programme area will be able to be full partners in projects during the 2014-2020 period providing their participation is shown to be essential to the given project.

3.2.2 North West Europe Transnational Co-operation Programme

Cardiff University has secured funding for its participation as a partner in four projects from the North West Europe Transnational Co-operation Programme: Innovative Management for Europe's Changing Coastal Resource ([IM-CORE](#)), European Network of Electric Vehicles and Transferring Expertise ([ENEVATE](#)), New Integrated Smart Mobility Options ([NISTO](#)), and Efficient LASER technology for FACTories of the future ([EcoLaserFact](#)). Together these projects have brought in just over £1M of funding during the period 2007 to 2013. Cardiff has found the North West Europe Programme to be consistently well-run, with clear guidance and advice being given by the Managing Authority.

Swansea University has also successfully engaged with this programme, securing an income of over £1.6mn for their Energetic Algae ([EnAlgae](#)) project.

3.2.3 Atlantic Area Programme

Cardiff University has been an active and successful participant in the Atlantic Area Programme (2007 to 2013) securing in excess of £1.5M of funding across six separate projects, co-ordinating three of these ([PREMI](#), [MAREN](#) and MAREN 2), which have all been led by academic staff from Cardiff School of Engineering.

3.2.4 Inter-regional Cooperation

Cardiff Metropolitan University have an equally enthusiastic assessment. Their coordination of the [SEE Project](#) (INTERREG IVC), a network of 11 European partners engaging with government to integrate design into innovation policies has been important in developing and sharing best practice in the area of design and eco-design and has in turn lead to other funding opportunities and the ability to influence design policy.

3.3 Creative Europe

General Remarks

Engagement with Creative Europe's predecessor programmes has been more limited among Welsh universities. This could be due to the relative lack of resources within the programme compared to other EU funding streams. Some of our universities have not engaged with these programmes as they do not represent their subject discipline mix but will be looking for opportunities where it can engage and add value to its activities in future.

3.3.1 Culture Programme

Aberystwyth University has engaged with the Culture Programme. Aberystwyth led the collaborative Literature Across Frontiers ([LAF](#)) project – a European Platform for Literary Exchange, Translation and Policy Debate. This project involves Aberystwyth as lead partner with 30+ partner institutions across Europe. LAF has given rise to many initiatives and projects which have since gained a life of their own and are now strong partners in an ever-widening circle of resources that reach beyond Europe into the Middle-East, South Mediterranean and as far as South Asia. These efforts have resulted in numerous events, journeys, debates, workshops, seminars, publications, and thousands of translated texts.

Given that there are few opportunities for arts funding under Horizon2020, Creative Europe is a focus for funding in this area for Aberystwyth 2014-2020. Together with the Aberystwyth Arts Centre, the university is considering plans to submit funding applications to the Media sub-programme of Creative Europe.

3.3.2 Media Programme

The University of South Wales (USW) successfully bid for Media Programme funding for the [TransformatLab](#) project. TransformatLab is a workshop-based training programme designed to give graduate-level creative media students from across Europe the chance to develop and pitch ideas in an intensive development lab. Following the success of this project, the university will seek to harness increased levels of external funding for their Creative Industries Faculty via the Creative Europe programme.

3.4. COSME

General Remarks

Given that COSME is predominantly aimed at SMEs, generally speaking it will be of less value to universities than the other funding programmes in this paper. However, the 'Entrepreneurship Education' initiative under COSME supporting exchanges between European educators and trainers is likely to be of interest as it aims to support best practice in entrepreneurship education in the EU. Cardiff University, for example, has no direct experience of participating in previous programmes but will be looking for opportunities where it can engage and add value to its activities under Creative Europe.

3.4.1 Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)

Swansea University has delivered the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) project under the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) for 15 months since September 2012. The university also been actively involved in making bids to the Eurostars programme since 2010. The EEN has provided a huge opportunity for the university to link and develop relationships with companies and research institutions across Europe and beyond. It has also helped to solidify and improve the university's links with the Welsh Government, the Technology Strategy Board (TSB), and other local business support providers to provide a more co-ordinated and beneficial service to SMEs and to university staff wanting to link with likeminded businesses.

Swansea will actively seek to continue to deliver the EEN network in Wales under the new COSME programme. The next EEN delivery period will see a UK wide partnership with the TSB who are looking to use the network to facilitate local regions accessing the Innovation funding and support from the TSB.

4. Challenges

- Applying for EU funding is often complex and time consuming. Whilst resource limitations in terms of sufficient time and staff to support project bids remains a major challenge, the complexity and differences between programmes is problematic. Further simplification of the guidelines and commonality between the European funding programmes would be welcome.
- EU funding is very competitive and becoming increasingly so (although Horizon2020 will be the most competitive of the relevant funding streams)
- Match funding is usually contributed either by way of overhead in-kind or staff time in-kind. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make these contributions in the current financial climate. This is a particular challenge for INTERREG as the intervention rate is relatively low. It is also problematic for Creative Europe, where for some schemes match funding of 50% of the eligible project costs is required, and indirect costs are capped at 7%.

5 Existing Support

- There is a strong consensus that British Council Wales has been notable in its provision of a practical and constructive support service for the Erasmus Programme. This is expected to continue into Erasmus+, particularly since British Council Wales has taken over management of the programme.
- Welsh Government support to facilitate engagement in INTERREG is deemed helpful. The availability and advice of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Development Officers is believed to significantly increase success rates.
- Support for Creative Europe is very limited with only one UK national contact point for the programme.
- A good level of support for accessing EU funding is provided to Welsh project partners through the Enterprise Europe Network Wales (EENW). The Welsh European Funding Office also have a good support team being developed to support SMEs in accessing Innovation support and funding through the SME Instrument (under COSME but part of Horizon2020 programme). This is supported and in part administered by EEN Wales. The Score Cymru fund will be invaluable to SMEs for the development of bids. SME engagement is becoming increasingly important for universities given the greater emphasis on innovation in the Horizon2020 programme.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Student Mobility

Increased financial commitment from the Welsh Government to support outward student mobility is essential if we are to push ahead with this agenda. One suggestion is to designate specific funding for a partial tuition fee reimbursement for students participating in year-long mobility activities. Ideally, this would be in line with the financial support offered to English universities. Not only would this be of financial benefit to Welsh institutions, but it would represent Wales's commitment to supporting the outward mobility and internationalisation agendas of the HE sector as a whole in Wales. Facilitating collaboration between sectors in Wales for joint applications to participate in Erasmus + activities would also be of benefit.

6.2. Programme Visibility

Additional support from the Welsh Government and the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) to give INTERREG greater visibility within Wales is crucial going forward. Previously, information and advice for the Atlantic Area and North West Europe Programmes has been provided on a UK-wide basis which has proven to be a limited resource.

6.3. Match Funding

Support via WG or other agencies to contribute to match funding should be identified if increased benefit is to be realised. WEFO's Targeted Match Fund (TMF) has been useful and would benefit from being extended. Bearing in mind that the projects in these areas can often lead to consortia for R&D funding, it has been suggested by some universities that perhaps SCORE Cymru could be broadened to include this type of support.

6.4. SCORE Cymru

Extending the remit of the Score Cymru fund to include a wider range of European programmes including Erasmus+ and INTERREG would significantly increase the opportunity for grant capture.

6.5. Best Practice

Representatives of the HE sector have put forward the view that establishing a pool of Welsh experts with an in depth knowledge of specific programmes/funding streams would be beneficial to future bids. This could take the form of a European Community of Practice bringing together experts in European proposal writing and evaluation. Increasing knowledge about these programmes within organisations and sharing between them is important as there are pockets of expertise across Wales. Given the complex nature of the EU funding application and evaluation, the sharing of expertise would prove highly valuable and could boost success rates across Wales.

WELSH HIGHER EDUCATION BRUSSELS AND HIGHER EDUCATION WALES

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