
**EXPANDING HORIZONS:
THE BENEFITS OF THE ERASMUS+
PROGRAMME TO FURTHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS IN WALES**

Oct 2020

CONTEXT

ColegauCymru collaborates with the British Council, the Erasmus+ National Agency, Further Education (FE) colleges and a wide network of international partners in order to provide work placements, training and study visits overseas for learners, apprentices and staff from the sector.

Since the launch of Erasmus+ in 2014, ColegauCymru has secured over €7million of investment for vocational learners and apprentices to undertake 2 to 3-week work placements across Europe. A proportion of this funding (€208,970) has been used to enable lecturers, managers and college leaders across Wales to undertake innovative Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in Finland, the Basque Country (Spain), Catalonia, Denmark and Italy. The visits focus on complementing Welsh Government priorities for the FE sector, the most recent being visits to Finland and Italy to explore internationalisation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and how to develop an international strategy for the sector.

ColegauCymru also has funding available from Erasmus+ staff mobility applications in 2019 and 2020. The 2019 funding will be used to visit the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport in Stuttgart to gain an insight into the region's VET digitalisation strategy. The focus of the application made in 2020 on the development of a professional learning

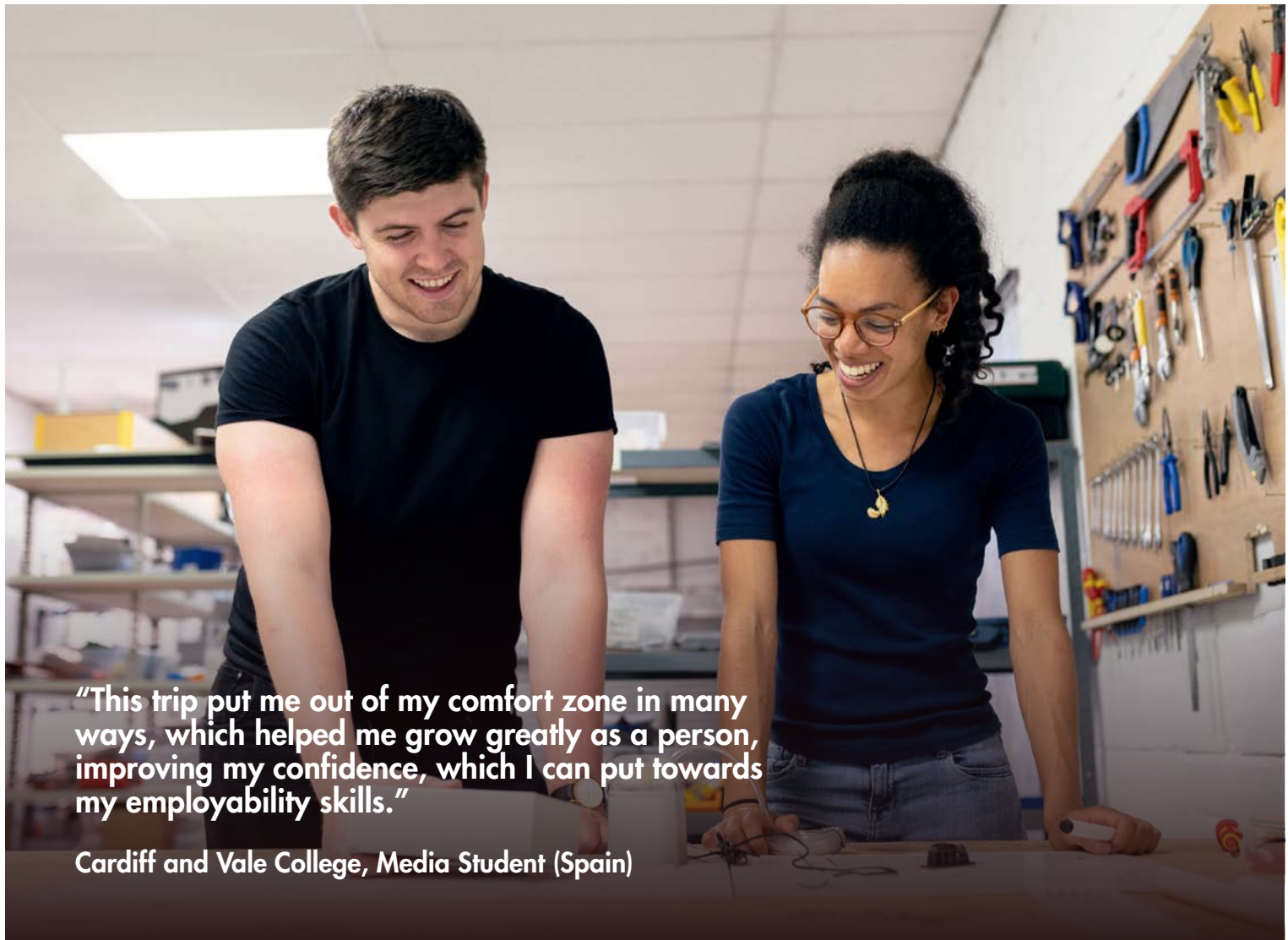
framework for the sector with visits planned to Austria, Ireland and Norway. These visits are currently on hold due to Covid19 restrictions.

Background

FE colleges have benefitted from European funding that has helped to support and upskill the population of Wales, and to make important contributions to business and the economy, often in the most deprived areas of Wales.¹ Vocational mobilities overseas have broadened the horizons and raised the aspirations of learners, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and these opportunities must remain available to the next cohort of learners.

During the 2020 round of Erasmus+ applications, ColegauCymru was successful in securing funding of €2.2m for projects due to run until 2022. The next seven-year cycle of Erasmus+ funding will run from 2021 until 2027. However, at this late stage in the Brexit negotiations, we still do not know if the UK will participate in this cycle of funding. This means that the participation of our learners and staff in these opportunities are in jeopardy. Welsh Government has maintained its position stating that the best possible scenario is that the UK remains a full member of Erasmus+ but the final decision lies with the UK Government.

¹ <https://www.colleges.wales/image/publications/reports/Involvement%20of%20Welsh%20FE%20colleges%20and%20institutions%20in%20EU%20funding/Involvement%20of%20Welsh%20FE%20colleges%20and%20institutions%20in%20EU%20funding%20Nov%202017%20ENG.pdf>



“This trip put me out of my comfort zone in many ways, which helped me grow greatly as a person, improving my confidence, which I can put towards my employability skills.”

Cardiff and Vale College, Media Student (Spain)

The UK Erasmus+ programme is overseen by the UK Department for Education. It is managed by a Programme Board which has Welsh Government representation. Overall delivery of Erasmus+ in the UK is undertaken by the National Agency (British Council in partnership with Ecorys). Welsh Government currently contributes approximately £200,000 per annum towards the costs of Erasmus+ to the UK Government (using the population-based Barnett formula). This covers the costs of management, delivery and promotion of the programme and ensures that the fund is accessible to Welsh organisations.

The relationship between the European Social Fund (ESF) and Erasmus+ is complementary. For example, the ESF programmes provide substantial support for vocational training in Wales (such as apprenticeships) and Erasmus+ has supported the Pan Wales Vocational Learner Mobility scheme run by ColegauCymru. At the time of writing, there is still no detail or clarity on what the replacement for EU funding – the UK Government’s Shared Prosperity Fund – will look like. Without knowing the amount of funding, along with the necessary priorities and processes, it is impossible for the FE sector to fully prepare for the end of the transition period. The high degree of concern about the potential loss of this funding across the FE sector must not be underestimated.

European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)

The current EQAVET project is a comprehensive study into well-functioning graduate tracking systems in other EU countries. This theme is fully in line with the objectives of the European Council Recommendation on tracking graduates. ColegauCymru is currently working on stage 2 of the proposal, to investigate the best practice in the selected countries, involving visits to key stakeholders. While this stage began with a successful pilot visit to Ireland in December 2019, the second visit to the Netherlands was cancelled in March 2020 due to the pandemic. Since then, the team has adapted their working style to hold meetings with key stakeholders using online platforms.

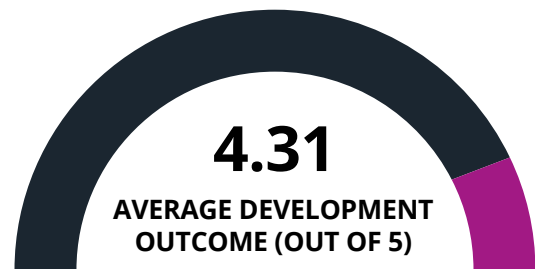
This is ColegauCymru’s third project funded through the EQAVET restricted call and will focus on countries and regions of Europe which have high quality data collection processes and effective usage of that data. Previous projects have focused on skills and economic resilience, as well as training needs in the retail, tourism and hospitality sectors².

MOBILITY VISIT FEEDBACK

In light of the UK's decision to leave the European Union, the future of the UK's participation in Erasmus+, and the subsequent opportunities that it affords countless learners, is in jeopardy. Following each mobility, the European Commission requests that all project participants complete a questionnaire providing feedback on areas where they have developed essential life skills. ColegauCymru analysed the responses provided in 496 learner questionnaires over four years (2016-2019). The results were extremely positive.

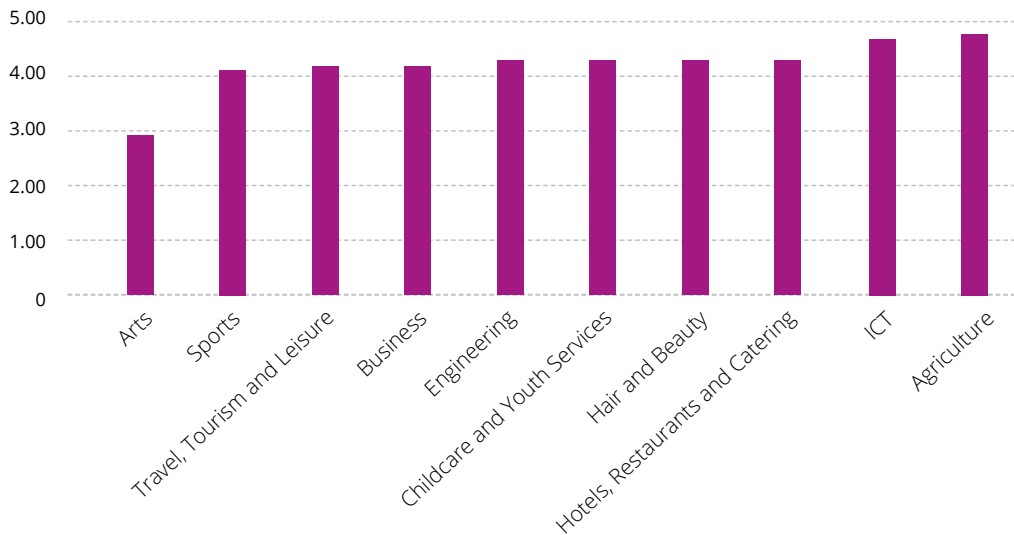
The table below shows the learners' assessment of improvement following their placement. Learners reported significant development and improvement across all four

areas of experience- future aspirations, technical skills, confidence, and tolerance.



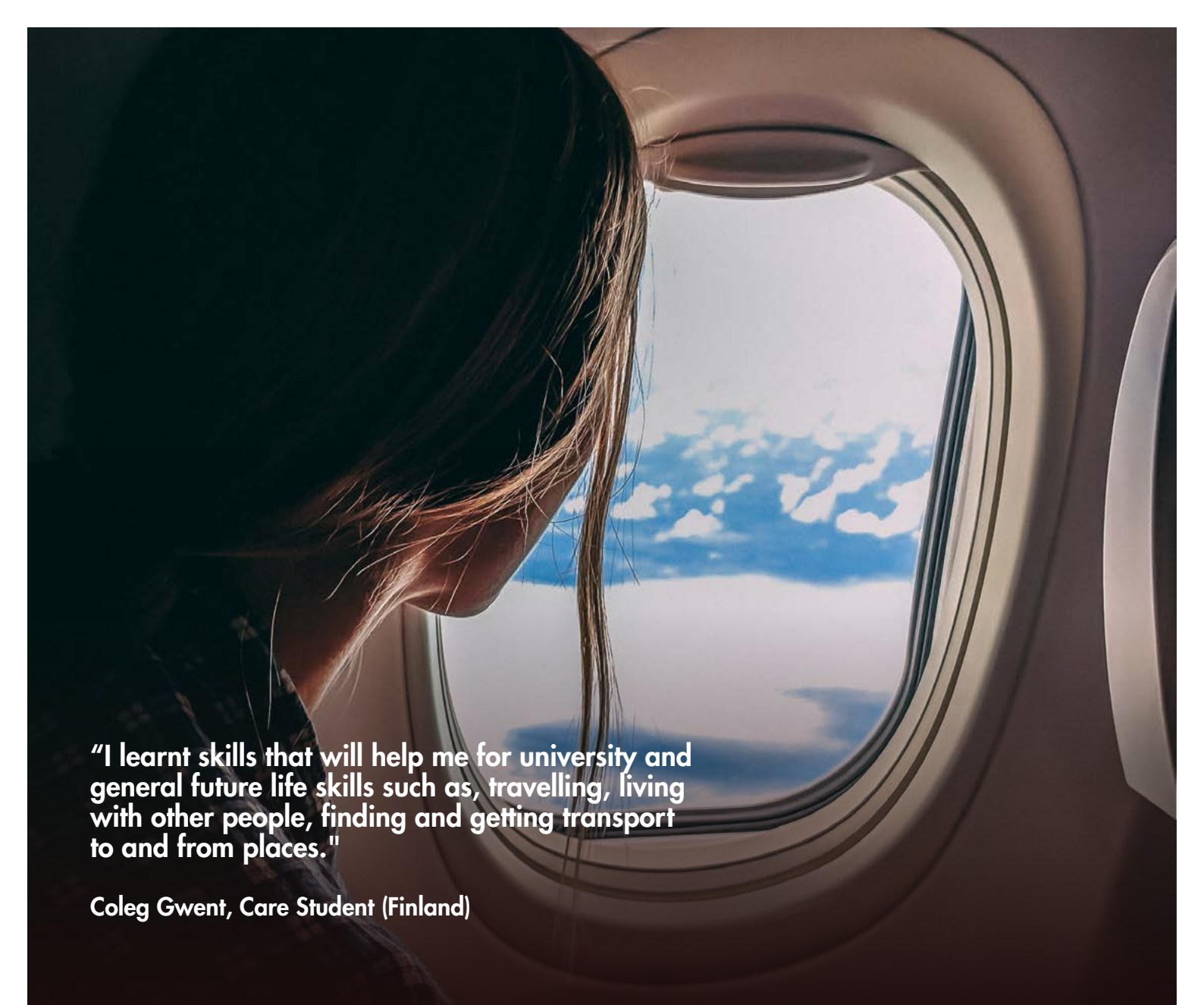
AVERAGE OUTCOME BY SECTOR

Fig. 1



It is clear to see that from a learner perspective, the opportunity to experience different cultures and work in an overseas environment overwhelmingly benefits them in a variety of development and skills-based areas. Erasmus+ provides unique opportunities, improves learner skill sets, and equips them with key skills to develop and grow. Building on this evidence, it is essential that the Welsh

Government continues to work with the UK Government to secure the UK's future participation in Erasmus+. If full participation in Erasmus+ is not possible, the Welsh Government should develop an alternative scheme to ensure that learners from Wales can still benefit from the opportunities and development made available to earlier generations of learners.



"I learnt skills that will help me for university and general future life skills such as, travelling, living with other people, finding and getting transport to and from places."

Coleg Gwent, Care Student (Finland)

Welsh Government support

Welsh Government is supportive of Erasmus+ and Wales' continued participation in the programme post-Brexit. Ministers, including the First Minister and Jeremy Miles, Counsel General and Minister for European Transition, have shared their concern over the potential loss of this life changing programme. On 13 August 2019, the Minister for Education Kirsty Williams, along with the Scottish Further and Higher Education Minister Richard Lochhead argued the case for continued participation in the programme. They called on

the Secretary of State for Education to meet with them as a matter of urgency to ensure Wales and Scotland remain full participants in the Erasmus+ programme³.

While Welsh Government and many Members of the Senedd have shown continued support for the Erasmus+ programme, the final decision will be made by the UK Government.

³ <https://gov.wales/concerns-welsh-students-will-miss-out-popular-erasmus-international-exchange-programme>

CONCLUSION – MAINTAINING LINKS AND PARTICIPATION

ColegauCymru's preference is for Wales, via the UK, to remain part of the full Erasmus+ scheme. However, if the UK is not a part of Erasmus+ post-Brexit, the UK Government will need to ensure there is no gap in funding for organisations while they develop a domestic alternative. Likewise, without greater detail on the UK Government's proposed Shared Prosperity Scheme, which is set to replace EU funding, it is difficult to plan such domestic alternative arrangements.

ColegauCymru is concerned that if the UK is no longer part of Erasmus+, relationships with reciprocal partners in the EU could be negatively impacted. Since leaving the EU in January 2020, the UK has already been excluded from some European Commission level networks such as the Advisory Group for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the forum meetings of European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET). ColegauCymru represented Wales in these network meetings and our understanding was that we would still be able to participate in these meetings during the transition period. These networking opportunities are crucial in ensuring that Wales' qualifications and quality assurance processes for VET are in line with those across Europe and provide a level playing field for workers and employers across the EU.

The Erasmus+ scheme has offered learners and staff the chance to broaden their horizons, to think differently about their learning, teaching and future careers and development. As we adapt to the changes brought by Covid-19, we will need to think of creative ways to adapt and expand our contact with European and global partners in the future. However, the principle of committing to Erasmus+, its opportunities and benefits, is central.

SIÂN HOLLERAN
EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL
PROJECT MANAGER



Siân is ColegauCymru's European and International Project Manager. Her main areas of work include coordinating a programme of overseas training opportunities for staff, learners and apprentices, acting for Welsh Government as the National Contact Point for EU initiatives and selling Wales to the world through working collaboratively with international partners. Siân also represents the further education sector on the steering group of Routes into Languages Cymru.



Phone
02920 522 500

Email
hello@collegeswales.ac.uk

CollegesWales
Unit 7 Cae Gwyrdd
Greenmeadow Springs
Tongwynlais Cardiff, CF15 7AB

Website
www.colleges.wales