

12 October 2023

Dear

ATISN 18982 International Learning Exchange Programmes

Information requested

Thank you for your request which I received on 15 September 2023. You asked for:

- Copies of any correspondence during 2023, between the Scottish and Welsh Government that includes references to the Scottish Education Exchange programme and /or Taith (the Wales International Learning Exchange programme).

Our response

The information you requested is enclosed at Annex 1.

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ
or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely

Note to the First Minister of Scotland on Taith

Background

The First Minister of Wales met with the First Minister of Scotland on 1 June 2023. During the conversation, the First Minister of Scotland requested more detail on Wales' international learning exchange programme – Taith. This note outlines the context that Taith was developed in and the reasons for the intervention; the steps taken to establish the programme; and the early returns from the programme, which is now in its second year of delivery.

Context

The UK's future participation in the Erasmus+ programme became part of the negotiations between the UK Government and the European Union, leading to a protracted period of uncertainty. Contingency arrangements to protect against a 'no deal' exit in 2019 were made with collaborative working of all four UK governments. The UK Government continued to progress the development of a replacement as negotiations continued; however, as it became clear they intended to deliver the programme using the UK Internal Market Act, the engagement with devolved governments became superficial.

The Welsh Government were enthusiastic advocates of the Erasmus+ programme and consistently clear in urging the UK Government to secure future participation in the programme.

In December 2020, the UK Government announced that they had chosen not to secure the UK's future participation in Erasmus+, and instead intended to implement a replacement – the 'Turing Scheme' – on a UK-wide basis without the consent of devolved ministers.

The failure to incorporate devolved ministers' priorities in the development and implementation of the Turing Scheme created clear shortcomings when compared to the Erasmus+ programme, including: a reduction in total funding; no funding for staff; no funding for inward mobility; no funding for youth organisations; and insufficient funding for schools.

Within the wider context of COVID-19, where opportunities for young people to travel and learn as part of their studies had already been compromised to an unprecedented level, the loss of Erasmus+ therefore would have further restricted access to international experiences.

Implementation

The Welsh Government announced in March 2021 that it would invest £65m in an 'International Learning Exchange Programme' for Wales. A grant was issued to Cardiff University, who were tasked with establishing a subsidiary company and developing the policy and systems required to deliver the programme. The first year of activity for the programme was targeted at academic year 2022-23, ensuring that the progressive reduction in Erasmus+ funding, as those projects concluded, would be mitigated.

The Programme Executive team were recruited and the programme was named 'Taith' – the Welsh word for 'journey' – after a public vote. An Advisory Board of key stakeholders was assembled for the initial development of the programme; work to expand and improve the programme's governance, now it is in the delivery phase, is ongoing.

In a similar way to Erasmus+, the Taith programme supports learners and staff at all education levels in Wales, including youth and adult education. It also embeds the opportunity for beneficiaries to support inward mobility – reciprocity – as a fundamental part of the programme.

Taith has two 'Pathways' for funding. Pathway 1 is focussed on the mobility of individuals, and accounts for the majority of Taith's activity. A second Pathway was then developed and launched in Autumn 2022. Pathway 2 invites applications for projects that are centred around strategically important themes, and concentrates more on output and dissemination. The themes in the first year were Climate Change, Developments in Education, and Diversity and Inclusivity.

Results so far

Since its announcement in March 2021, Taith has gone from strength to strength. The programme continues to be enthusiastically welcomed by stakeholders across Wales and internationally – particularly by European partners.

In 2022, Taith funded 74 projects at a combined value of £11.66m. Broken down by Pathway, there were 55 successful Pathway 1 projects, with a total value of £10.6m, and 19 successful Pathway 2 projects, with a total value of £1.06m. More detail on individual beneficiaries and funding per sector is published on the Taith website – www.taith.wales.

Results from the Pathway 1 2023 call will be published soon. Awareness of the programme continues to grow across Wales and internationally, and we anticipate applications growing year-on-year as a result.

The programme has enjoyed particular success in engaging with the Schools, Youth, and Adult Education sectors. These sectors, which are typically hardest to reach – particularly with the impact of the pandemic – have been enthusiastic in their support of Taith and will remain a key focus for the programme going forward. A refreshed programme strategy will be published later this year; the strategy will reflect Taith's emphasis on providing opportunities for young people that stand the most to gain from travelling to study abroad, and overcoming the barriers that may prevent their participation.

Welsh Government officials responsible for Taith are in regular correspondence and discussion with counterparts in the Scottish Government. If the Scottish Government plans for a similar scheme progress, the Welsh Government officials will be happy to share the lessons learned from setting up Taith and answer any questions that may prove helpful.

June 2023.