

# Brexit funding gap could hit Welsh colleges

The Minister was speaking following a visit to Coleg Gwent's Newport campus on Monday where she met those who have benefitted from EU funded courses and projects.

Over the past 10 years alone, FE Institutes in Wales have reported<sup>1</sup> that they have been involved in the delivery of EU funded projects worth a total value of nearly £600m, made up of EU funds and match funding from public and private sources.

These involve EU backed programmes and projects which

- enable FE Institutes to deliver subsidised training to employers to support employees jobs and growth;
- support college and school learners at risk of becoming NEET
- support rural skills training; and
- give learners the opportunity to gain work experience or learn abroad.

Over the last decade, projects supported by EU funds in Wales have helped 81,400 people into work and supported 282,600 people in Wales to gain qualifications. The projects include the £19m Upskilling@Work scheme backed with EU funding of £10.8m which is led by Coleg Gwent and Coleg Y Cymoedd. It provides work-based training programmes to develop the skills and careers of over 8,000 employees in companies across South East Wales.

In addition, FE institutions are helping to deliver much of the training for the Welsh Government's Apprenticeship programme. Backed by EU funding of £206m, Apprenticeships are helping people to learn while they earn a wage and gain the skills and competences they need in the workplace.

The Welsh Government wants guarantees from Whitehall that EU funding will be replaced after the UK leaves the EU and for decisions on how it is invested to continue to be made in Wales.

The Welsh Government has also called for the UK to participate in a range of European co-operation programmes after Brexit including ERASMUS+, an EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, to support learning from best practice in Europe and beyond.

Eluned Morgan said:

“Further Education Institutions are central to Wales' communities, providing the training and skills that are essential to the growth of our economy. Over the past decade Welsh colleges have benefitted from hundreds of millions of pounds of EU investment that has made a real difference to people's lives.

“The UK voted to leave the EU, but no one in Wales voted for our colleges to lose funding that supports people, businesses and the economy. The UK Government needs to give a guarantee that this vital EU funding is replaced and continues to support people through our colleges, many of which are in some of our most disadvantaged communities.

“Our FE sector faces a double Brexit whammy – losing EU funding and having to meet the challenge of meeting potential skills gaps and changes to our economy as we leave the EU. The Welsh Government will back the sector all the way, but the UK Government needs to meet the promise made that Wales would not lose a penny due to Brexit.”

Iestyn Davies, Chief Executive of ColegauCymru, said:

“There has never been a more important time to make sure that Further Education Colleges continue to receive the levels of funding that allow them to invest in learners, communities and facilities to face the challenges ahead.

“As the UK prepares to leave the EU, the life-changing opportunities for learners to experience work placements in European partner countries via Erasmus+ must be maintained.

“In the absence of a clear outline of the UK Government’s proposed ‘Shared Prosperity Fund’, the EU funding that Wales would have received must be replaced and guaranteed in full by the UK Treasury. Likewise, assurance must also be given by the UK Government that all mechanisms relating to this funding will stay in Wales to ensure continuity. This will provide the assurances necessary to business, institutions, and most importantly learners and apprentices.”