

Taith – Written submission for the TCA enquiry (Scotland)

Taith is the Welsh Government funded international learning exchange programme for Wales. It is for people in every part of Wales, in every education sector – schools, youth, adult education, further education, vocational education and training, and higher education, and every education type – formal, informal and non-formal.

Taith has been established to create life-changing opportunities for people in Wales to learn, study and volunteer all over the world.

Taith has two grant funding opportunities:

- Pathway 1, which supports organisations based in Wales to send their learners, young people, staff and volunteers on an international learning exchange. [Pathway 1 - Taith](#)
- Pathway 2, which supports educational innovation in Wales through international collaborations. [Pathway 2 - Taith](#)

Strategy

We refreshed our [strategy](#) in October 2023 to ensure greater focus on inclusion and accessibility.

Taith's purpose is to create life-changing opportunities for learners and young people across Wales through international learning exchanges. Our mission is to fund inclusive and accessible international educational exchange opportunities for learners and staff across Wales, with opportunities for international learners and staff to visit Welsh partners.

We aim to improve access for people from underrepresented groups including:

- Disabled people
- people from ethnic minority backgrounds
- people with additional learning needs
- people from disadvantaged backgrounds

Our objectives are:

1. Ensure exchanges provide the greatest impact
2. Fund high quality learning exchange projects
3. Support educational innovation in Wales

How we developed the programme

Taith was created following the UK government's decision to withdraw the UK from Erasmus+. The Welsh Government made the decision to fund a Welsh programme which aimed, where possible, to fill the gap left by the withdrawal from Erasmus+. Taith was therefore initially developed with this aim – to offer the same activities, to the same types of participants and within the same education sectors. The principles of reciprocity were also key, with funding available to bring people into Wales, as well as for people in Wales to travel abroad.

Ongoing consultation with the sectors, and better understanding the challenges and barriers they face has enabled us to develop Taith into a programme which works for all education sectors. Taith genuinely welcomes and supports small organisations who have never previously believed that international exchange was an option for them or their participants. We offer support, advice, and guidance to those with little experience, and who are often time and resource poor, but with a passion and a vision for providing opportunities for those with the most to gain. We provide additional funding for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, Disabled people and people with additional learning needs, to overcome barriers to their participation, as well as providing additional funding to those organisations supporting participants from these underrepresented groups.

The areas which we feel have had the most significant impact on the success of the Taith programme are:

1. **Engagement and outreach with all sectors**, developing strong, open relationships with stakeholders which enables open and honest conversations and feedback
2. **Regular review and adaption of the programme policy** to ensure continuous improvement, to take feedback into consideration, and to overcome barriers to participation
3. **Support mechanisms** in place to support organisations to raise awareness of the programme, support organisations to apply, and support them throughout the duration of their projects - Taith Programme Officers, Sector Organising Bodies and Taith Champions
4. **Communication** which seeks to be open and welcoming and the use of inclusive and accessible language
5. **Financial support to address barriers to participation**, including actual costs for participants with barriers to accessing the programme who are Disabled, have additional learning needs, or who come from a disadvantaged background

Life changing opportunities

Pupil referral units, special schools and charities working with the most vulnerable in society have been able to take young people and adults on genuinely life changing international exchanges. Many of these organisations had never considered international exchange before the creation of Taith. Homeless young people, children excluded from mainstream education, adults with lived experience of substance misuse, mental health and the justice system, children with severe and complex disabilities and additional learning needs have all been given the opportunity to travel and learn overseas because of Taith. Many of them have never left their hometown before, let alone travelled abroad. The stories we have been told about the impact of the opportunities on the lives of these young people, and in many cases on the lives of their families, are humbling and awe-inspiring in equal measure. Links to a few of these stories below:

Ysgol Pen y Bryn is the largest special school in Swansea for pupils aged 3 to 19 with a wide range of additional learning needs. Their pupils have a wide range of academic needs, and many come from a background of deprivation. In March 2024 they took seven pupils and staff to Florida to explore a different environment which would provide cultural experiences, important life skills and connections with American students.

<https://www.taith.wales/story/ysgol-pen-y-bryn-visit-florida-united-states/>

Portfield School is a special needs school for children and young people aged 3 – 19 located in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. Their pupils have a diverse range of complex and profound special needs. Through Taith funding, they were able to take pupils from Key Stage 3/4 on fully accessible learning exchanges to Belgium and Sweden.

<https://www.taith.wales/story/portfield-school-visit-belgium-and-sweden/>

St Giles is a charity with a vision to create inclusive communities where the voices of those facing the greatest adversity can be heard, where opportunities flourish, and where positive futures are realised. St Giles uses expertise and real-life past experiences to provide advice, advocacy and support for people held back by poverty, exploitation, abuse, dealing with addiction or mental health problems, caught up in crime or a combination of these issues and others. In March 2024, they embarked on an inspiring journey, taking a group of individuals with lived experience to Norway. As part of their trip, they visited a Norwegian recovery centre that champions the transformative power of peer support in recovery.

<https://www.taith.wales/story/st-giles-trust-visit-norway/>

Canolfan Addysg Conwy is a pupil referral unit for learners facing challenges in mainstream education. Most of the learners suffer with mental health issues brought about by anxiety and low self-confidence following traumatic mainstream school experiences. These traumas, alongside identified and unidentified additional learning needs and adverse childhood experiences outside of the school setting, result in pupils with significant and complex learning, social and emotional needs. In February 2024, a group of learners and accompanying staff travelled to Finland. For many of the learners it was their first time out of Wales, and provided them with an opportunity to develop skills, build confidence, and to open their eyes to a new country and culture.

<https://www.taith.wales/story/penrhos-avenue-pupil-referral-unit-canolfan-addysg-conwy-visit-finland/>

Taith, Turing and Erasmus+

As highlighted above, Taith was initially developed with the intention of filling the gap left by Erasmus+. As a result, the eligible sectors are the same, as are the eligible activities/mobility types. Where the programmes differ is in the duration of HE mobility opportunities (Taith allows much shorter durations for reasons of accessibility and inclusion) - and in the approach and focus of the programme. We have worked hard to position Taith as a programme for all education sectors, which works equally well for youth as it does for higher education, whereas Erasmus+ has traditionally been seen as primarily a programme for higher education. We have taken feedback on board from organisations in Wales who did not feel able to apply to Erasmus+ for a variety of reasons, and tried to develop and implement measures within Taith to address these barriers.

The below is a comparison of Erasmus+ data for Wales (for all Key Actions) 2017 – 2019, and Taith data for both Pathways 2022 – 2024 (it does not include Pathway 2 2024 data as the assessment process is ongoing). The Taith numbers will therefore increase once this process is complete). The intention was to compare Taith and Erasmus+ data for Wales over a comparable 3 year period.

Number of Welsh applicants and successful organisations for E+ and Taith. Organisations which apply more than once are counted only once.

	Erasmus+	Taith
No of Welsh applicants (unique)	137	176
No of funded Welsh organisations (unique)	78	136

Number of funded unique Welsh organisations within each sector. Organisations are counted once per sector.

	Erasmus+	Taith
Schools	46	70
Youth	12	31
Adult Education	5	17
FE/VET	13	16
HE	7	8

It is not yet possible to compare participant data as Taith projects funded in 2022 – 2024 are ongoing and not all mobilities have yet taken place. We are on course to exceed the number of learners who took part in an international learning exchange under Erasmus+, over a comparable period, despite limited funding and the challenges associated with being a new programme. This is particularly stark in the youth sector, where we have already seen over 4 times more young people go abroad for an international exchange through Taith than did under Erasmus+ over the comparable 3 year period.

The key similarities between Taith and Turing are that both are global programmes, both offer shorter durations for HE, and both have a significant focus on inclusion and the participation of people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The main differences are that Taith is reciprocal, allowing participants to come into Wales as well as participants to travel from Wales, whereas Turing allows outward mobilities only. Turing is open to the Schools, FE and HE sectors, Taith also includes Youth and Adult Education. Turing is for learners only, Taith is open to learners and staff.

Below is a comparison of the number of funded projects for Taith and Turing for the funding call years 2022 – 2024. Taith data includes both Pathway 1 and Pathway 2 for all years apart from 2024. The assessment process is ongoing for this funding call and so we do not yet have data on the number of funded projects.

2022

	Schools	Youth	Adult Education	FE/VET	HE
Taith	22	17	9	12	14*
Turing	1	N/A	N/A	1	8

CEEAC/S6/25/5/1

2023

	Schools	Youth	Adult Education	FE/VET	HE
Taith	36	17	5	14	14*
Turing	2	N/A	N/A	3	6

2024

	Schools	Youth	Adult Education	FE/VET	HE
Taith	25	16	6	10	6**
Turing	4	N/A	N/A	4	7

* In 2022 and 2023, Taith allowed HEIs to apply under 2 strands – education and research. This accounts for why there are more applications within the HEI sectors than HEIs in Wales.

** In 2024 the education and research strands were merged.