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Education, Children and Young People Committee

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Wednesday 24 May 2023

CONTENTS

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INTERNATIONAL LEARNING EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES 1

**EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
16th Meeting 2023, Session 6**

CONVENER

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

*Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con) (Committee Substitute)

Susana Galván (Taith)

Liz Green (YouthLink Scotland)

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

Elid Morris (Taith)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Pauline McIntyre

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 24 May 2023

[The Deputy Convener opened the meeting at 09:18]

International Learning Exchange Programmes

The Deputy Convener (Ben Macpherson): Good morning and a warm welcome to the 16th meeting in 2023 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. We have apologies from Bob Doris, Ross Greer and our convener, Sue Webber. I welcome Meghan Gallacher and Ivan McKee as substitute members. Stephanie Callaghan joins us remotely.

A reminder for those who are joining us remotely: if you would like to come in at any point, please type R in the chat function, and the clerks will alert me.

Our first agenda item is an evidence session on international learning exchange programmes. I warmly welcome Susana Galván, executive director, and Elid Morris, head of operations, Taith, who join us remotely; and Liz Green, workforce and practice manager, YouthLink Scotland, who joins us in person.

Members have a number of questions, which they will direct either to Liz Green, in the room, or to our witnesses from Taith, down the line. Our first questions are to YouthLink Scotland and come from Stephanie Callaghan.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): My first question is the obvious one: what impact has the withdrawal of Erasmus+ had on youth work in Scotland?

Liz Green (YouthLink Scotland): It has had a huge impact, at a time when the youth work sector is stretched. It is a difficult time for the sector and for young people, who more than ever need youth work and opportunities to learn and grow. The removal of that funding and that learning opportunity ecosystem from Scotland is significant.

On the financial value of Erasmus+, in the last seven-year cycle of the programme, youth projects in Scotland received €5,389,664. The funding cycle for this seven years of Erasmus+ has doubled such that we are potentially missing out on €10.7 million. That is a significant financial impact on a sector that is really in need of funding

for young people who need those opportunities more than ever.

The youth strand of Erasmus+ and the youth work sector can help those young people who do not have opportunities to travel and to gain the benefits of international exchange and intercultural learning to have those experiences. Research has shown that those young people gain the most from those experiences and that it is most transformative and life changing for them. The fact that a key route to those experiences is unavailable to the sector and to those young people is having a significant negative impact on the youth work sector and on young people.

The ending of the youth volunteering strand, which has supported charities and youth organisations across the youth sector and beyond, is also significant in relation to long-term volunteering programmes. The British Red Cross is looking at potentially having to end parts of its 25-year youth volunteering programme because it does not have the opportunity to continue that funding.

We are hopeful that the Scottish education exchange programme will enable a change in relation to some of that negative impact.

Stephanie Callaghan: That is very challenging, indeed.

You said that young people need those opportunities more than ever. I must declare an interest as the mother of a sixth-year pupil who is just leaving school. I am very aware that young people who are leaving sixth year just now are being really harshly impacted. Covid started during their third year at school and lasted right the way through their national 4s and 5s and into their highers. They did not, as the previous year did, benefit from getting automatic upgrades when they appealed. It really does not seem fair that the Erasmus+ replacement will not be there in time for them but will be a bit too late for them, when they have been through quite so much.

Would you make any specific recommendations in relation to things that the Scottish Government could do to monitor and support those young people and maximise their positive outcomes and experiences, when they are missing out on that part?

Liz Green: That is a really good question. On monitoring, investing in research on the impact on young people would be significant. We have done some research on the youth work sector's response to Covid. I would like to consult with colleagues, as that is a really broad question, and the fact that they have missed out on various things will affect many aspects of their lives.

If it happened soon enough, investment in an exchange programme and in the youth work sector would mean that those young people would be able to gain some of those experiences. The youth strand of Erasmus+ works with people up to the age of 30 and youth work in Scotland works with young people up to the age of 25. If we were able to get a strand up and running soon, it would therefore still be possible for those young people to benefit from those experiences.

Stephanie Callaghan: Perhaps it would be helpful to have a focus on that age group specifically.

Liz Green: Yes. That would be of real interest. The sector is ready; it has supported those young people throughout Covid and is keen to support them through the really challenging time that they are having.

We know that Erasmus+ opportunities have helped young people to gain skills for employment and helped young people who would not necessarily have gone on to further or higher education or employment to take those steps and to have much greater life opportunities than they would otherwise have had.

We have an example from the Jack Kane community centre. The young people developed a programme and did an exchange in Italy focusing, with their peers, on employment. All the young people from that project went on to further education or employment. They are from greater Craigmillar, which is the fourth most deprived area of Scotland. Prior to that programme, they did not necessarily have prospects of moving on to those opportunities, and that is an example of significantly life-changing opportunities through youth exchange.

Stephanie Callaghan: Is there anything that you would like to talk about in relation to young people with additional support needs who perhaps struggled to get that support during the pandemic?

Liz Green: I would like to follow that up with colleagues who have specific expertise in that. The comment that I would make around the international exchange is that one of the aspects of Erasmus+ was that it really tried to engage young people who had fewer opportunities. That is one of the positive aspects of the Turing scheme—that it has outlined specific provisions to support young people who might need that additional support to participate. In the principles that we proposed to the Scottish Government team for the new programme, we suggested that, as well as having a very accessible programme, there should be an inclusion fund. That would mean that any costs for support and proper participation in a programme that were not identified in the initial application could be met so

that young people with additional support needs, who perhaps were not in the original group, could be well supported to make the most of the opportunities.

The Deputy Convener: We would be interested to receive the information on those follow-up points. Ruth Maguire has a follow-up question.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Good morning. You have painted a great picture of the value of the schemes and the type of young people who are missing out. Can you give the committee an indication of the number of young people who were participating?

Liz Green: I might need to come back to you with those details. With the youth strand, it is not so easy to drill down to those specific numbers.

I apologise—I am just trying to find those figures.

I am really sorry, but I will need to come back to you with the numbers, particularly because some of the programmes were also around building capacity for practitioners and strategic partnerships in the sector. The number of young people who were positively impacted by those has a huge ripple effect, but I will come back to you with those numbers.

Ruth Maguire: That would be helpful, thank you.

The Deputy Convener: Stephen Kerr has a small supplementary question.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Can you also tell us what the annual cost of those activities would have been when we had Erasmus+? You mentioned €10.7 million, but you said that that was a big increase, so what would it normally be?

Liz Green: The successful applications for the youth strand over the past seven years of the programme came to nearly €5.4 million—

Stephen Kerr: Was that annually?

Liz Green: It was different each year. In 2020, it was €656,000.

Stephen Kerr: That was the Covid year, of course. Is about €5 million the average cost?

Liz Green: It was about €5 million over the seven-year period.

Stephen Kerr: Was it about €5 million annually over that period?

Liz Green: No, it was €5 million as a total.

Stephen Kerr: That was the total, so it is a very small amount of money.

Liz Green: One of the elements of Erasmus+ was that, like all European funding programmes, there is not full cost recovery, so there is an expectation that organisations will—

Stephen Kerr: Fund it.

Liz Green: Yes, and that participants will be part of the funding.

One of the things that we have an opportunity to do in Scotland is have a programme that is more accessible to smaller, grass-roots organisations by enabling full cost recovery. For example, for youth exchanges with Erasmus+, there was some funding, with a set amount each day for accommodation, subsistence and travel for each young person. However, there was no funding available for staff time, yet staff members from the youth work sector were there supporting young people, and they were involved in both the preparation, which is significant, as it could take two years to prepare young people to go on such an exchange, and the follow-up. We have an opportunity to support the sector so that more grass-roots organisations participate.

09:30

Stephen Kerr: The point that I was trying to highlight is that the cost, spread over a period of years, is very modest. Frankly, it is a pittance.

Liz Green: Yes, and it has a significant impact.

The Deputy Convener: If there is anything further that you would like to clarify and that would be useful for the committee, please provide it in your follow up. Willie Rennie has questions for our witnesses from Taith.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I wonder whether our friends in Wales would give us an introduction to Taith, covering how it works, how successful it has been, what the organisational structure is, where it is run from and how it is funded.

Susana Galván (Taith): Sure. Good morning, everyone. I apologise that we could not join you in Edinburgh. We are joining you from Cardiff, and I thank you for inviting us.

We are very proud of the Taith programme. It was launched in February 2022, and it was the outcome of an announcement by the Welsh Government in March 2021 to make an investment of £65 million over four years to support an international learning exchange programme for Wales. It was clearly a decision that was made as a result of the decision for the UK to step out of the Erasmus+ programme.

Following the announcement in March 2021, it was agreed that Cardiff University would host the programme, and we were set up as a subsidiary

company of the university. It was done in that way to ensure that, as a funding agency, Taith would have a degree of independence and, in case of future changes in Government, a level of sustainability.

On the governance structure, as a subsidiary company of Cardiff University, we report to a board of directors, who are linked to the university but are independent of it, with one of them being the chair of our advisory board. That is Kirsty Williams, who is the former Minister for Education in Wales. The role of the advisory board is to challenge and sense check the accounts, policies and strategy developments of the programme. However, the decision-making board is the board of directors.

The programme is fully funded by the Welsh Government so we report to it as our funder. We have a grant agreement letter that sets out the conditions of our grant of £65 million, which we disburse on the Government's behalf. There are certain reporting conditions in the grant agreement letter on how that money can be used.

As I said, the programme was launched in February 2022 under the name Taith, which means "journey" in Welsh. The name was chosen by the people of Wales through a public naming competition. The programme was set up to use some of the strengths of Erasmus+ and learn lessons from it, with a view to making the programme very Welsh focused. A consultation process took place across the learning sectors of Wales to ensure that the Taith programme was not just a copy and paste of Erasmus+, that it filled some of the gaps from the loss of Erasmus+ and that it strengthened some aspects of it.

The programme is open to all learning sectors in Wales: higher education, further education, vocational education and training, schools, the youth sector and the adult learning sector. Eligible organisations in Wales can apply for funding that will support outward mobility from Wales to the world, but they can also apply for funding to enable inward mobility to Wales. The percentage of inward mobility funding is 30 per cent of the total outward mobility funding that they apply for.

One of the key aspects—Liz Green mentioned this—is that Taith aims to be an all-inclusive scheme, so inclusion, access and widening participation are at the heart of the programme. We are trying to deliver a programme that will reach out not just to all the sectors, but to organisations within them that have perhaps not had the opportunity to benefit from such opportunities before, maybe because they thought that it was too difficult or too bureaucratic or that it was not for them. Within those organisations, we want to widen participation by reaching out to participants from disadvantaged backgrounds,

participants with disabilities or additional learning needs, and so on.

We are still in the early stages. We had the first round of funding in 2022, which was successful. Now, as the projects are starting to be delivered, we are starting to get data, which will allow us to identify any gaps in meeting the aims and objectives of the programme. It is evolving as we go along and we are seeing where we need to make adjustments to the programme's policies or processes to make it better and make sure that we meet the objectives.

That is the situation in a nutshell, but I am sure that you will have more questions.

Willie Rennie: That is very helpful. Will you tell me about the problems that you have faced and how you have overcome them? We have heard concerns that, with free movement of people ending, there may be problems with visas. Is that an issue? Is it an issue with the rest of the world?

Susana Galván: Internally, from a Welsh perspective, one of the challenges was the timeline to which the programme was set up. We were given a mandate to start having mobilities from September 2022. As you can imagine, with the programme being launched in the same year, we were working to very tight deadlines. That was a key challenge. We are proud that we got to where we are today.

It is a great feature of Taith that it includes so many sectors, but we want to make sure that the policies, processes and criteria of the project are consistent, transparent and open. Sometimes, the needs of the sectors are so different that it can be a bit of a challenge. On the other hand, we have the advantage that Wales is a relatively small nation so we are able, as a programme, to engage very proactively with the sectors. They can pick up the phone and talk to us at any point. Our relationships and our engagement with the sectors are just as important as the technical aspect of managing and disbursing grants.

Externally, one of the challenges has been visas, which you mentioned. As I said, there is an inward mobility aspect to Taith, and particularly with work-based mobilities—things such as apprenticeships and work-based learning—the current visa regime makes it really difficult for those mobilities to take place. We are constantly raising that with the Welsh Government and saying, “This is the feedback that we’re getting from beneficiaries.” We also discuss the topic when we meet international partners, particularly European ones, as a point of challenge.

The visa regime can also be a challenge for outward mobility, particularly because Taith is sometimes not recognised. It is not as well known as Erasmus. We are seeking to ensure that the

programme is known and that people know that it facilitates the mobilities. Visas and immigration issues are beyond our control, of course, but they are certainly a challenge for us.

Willie Rennie: You have obviously overcome them, because 5,000 people have benefited from the programme over the past year. Is that correct? You have obviously had some success.

Susana Galván: Yes. In the first round of applications, in 2022, we had two pathways, as we call them, or open funding calls. When the two calls were combined, we had more than 100 applications from across all sectors, more than 70 of which were successful. Those projects, combined, will deliver more than 6,000 inward and outward mobilities.

Yes, the approach has been successful, but given that work, volunteering and apprenticeships are part of the mix, that issue will be the key challenge as we move forward.

The Deputy Convener: I am pleased to call Bill Kidd, who has some questions for YouthLink Scotland.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Thank you, convener, and welcome to the meeting, Ms Green.

You touched on this in your reply to Stephanie Callaghan’s question, but what has been the impact of the withdrawal of Erasmus+ on youth work’s links with Europe? Is it still in the same boat?

Liz Green: Basically, we are trying really hard to keep our relationships going. There is such good will from partners, particularly towards us in Scotland, because they know that we want to be outward facing and to maintain these relationships for our sector and the young people with whom we are working. We are trying really hard to keep those links going, but I think that the longer that we wait, the more fragile those relationships get. However, at the moment those relationships are really successful.

Perhaps I can give you a couple of examples. We work closely with one of our counterparts, the Bavarian Youth Council, on a two-way exchange programme for youth workers on digital youth work and gender; that programme is funded by the Bavarian Youth Exchange Foundation, and we are extremely lucky to have partnerships that are strong enough for our partner to seek funding for that bilateral exchange.

Moreover, a lot of our members are part of international organisations—for example, the uniformed groups, the YMCA and so on—and they maintain those connections beyond Europe and outwith Erasmus+ funding. That said, when everything is more financially stretched, not having

that funding source for the European work will always pose a challenge.

We are also part of an international youth policy dialogue group on youth work policy across Europe and beyond—I believe that a member of the group is from Japan. It is all about keeping those connections strong and trying to keep the door open so that, when there is a funding programme, we can move swiftly.

Finally, we are still part of the Council of Europe, and some work is being carried out with the Council of Europe-European Union youth partnership. There is also a European youth work agenda that goes across the full Council of Europe and European Union membership—the process for implementing that is called the Bonn process—and, in our recommendations to the Scottish Government, we say that it is really critical that the youth work strand of the new programme aligns with that agenda to ensure that it is relevant to partners.

Indeed, it comes back to what Susana Galván was saying about how we encourage people to buy into something when they could go to Erasmus+. Why would they want to take part in a Scottish education exchange programme? Well, because it aligns with the agenda that they are already working to and because youth work in Scotland is fantastic. We are already making huge inroads into that agenda and there is a great opportunity to make the most of that situation.

Bill Kidd: You mentioned the financial side of things, funding and such like. What sort of financial impact has no longer having access to Erasmus+ had on member organisations? Are they struggling to get by, or are they managing to cover things?

Liz Green: It depends on the organisation. We have spoken to the British Red Cross, which is looking at potentially closing a strand of its youth volunteering programme and losing staff if it cannot get that additional funding.

At the moment, some of the projects in our sector's organisations are funded for up to three years. They could apply up to the end of 2020, so there are some organisations that are still benefiting from that funding and are able to pursue those projects. However, that funding is coming to an end and there is no replacement, so we will probably see people continuing to struggle. The situation is varied across the sector: a lot of people have had to close down those opportunities in order to keep running, while some organisations have either closed or significantly reduced their work because of the situation.

09:45

Bill Kidd: Youth work organisations will be looking to continue to deliver. Have many of them been able to explore alternative activities that they can use to replace Erasmus+ in order to avoid financial closure?

Liz Green: We are a resilient and creative sector and we are always trying to find new sources of funding. There are examples from the Scouts of young people fundraising for their international exchange, by doing bag packing and so on. However, that is not sustainable for every organisation and for many young people that step is more than they can do in addition to getting prepared and being able to ready themselves for the exchange.

People are looking for funding elsewhere. We have encouraged people to apply to Turing in partnership with schools and colleges, but that is really hard—we will probably get to that later—because it is not really made for our sector.

I know about one bilateral source of funding, which is for UK-German connections. Sometimes, small pots of funding can be used for youth exchanges through that source. We are part of a group that is trying to review that programme and to grow it for the future. We will be putting a survey out to the sector in the coming months around how that programme could be augmented.

It would be useful to grow further bilateral relationships—programmes that are funded by the foreign offices of two countries—because not that many of them exist.

Bill Kidd: So, in spite of the financial difficulties, you are keeping a positive outlook on things. Thank you very much.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning to the witnesses; thank you for answering the questions so far and for the information that you have given us in advance, which I have found particularly helpful.

I will start by putting questions to our colleagues from Wales. I am really keen to understand a bit more about how the system that you created has reached out to underrepresented groups and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Will you tell us a bit about how successful Taith has been in doing that? What are the key aspects of the programme that have made it successful in that regard?

Elid Morris (Taith): Good morning. As Susana Galván has said, that is a key strand of the programme strategy. As part of our support mechanism to encourage applications, we consult with a range of groups, and we have dedicated team members who are responsible for engaging across the sectors. We fund key organisations to

work across the sectors, which is a mechanism to really engage across the board.

Part of the funding that we offer relates to some of the challenges around maximising opportunities, to which colleagues in YouthLink Scotland have referred. We offer additional funding for successful applications to cover things such as inclusion costs and support for people who have additional learning needs and for those who face exceptional financial barriers to ensuring that engagement; that mechanism ensures that support.

We run the programme very much as Erasmus+ and the Turing schemes are run, on a grant rate unit cost basis. The rates are reviewed annually, to ensure that we respond to any needs and requirements—the cost of living, for example—and barriers to participation. That is a clear strand of the programme, and we constantly review the policy to ensure that there is wide engagement and, when it comes to barriers, to ensure that the programme is inclusive and responds to the requirements of those who are underrepresented or who have additional learning needs and disabilities.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Does your programme offer shorter-term exchanges?

Elid Morris: It does. That is a key part of some of the activities, and the need for that has come through clearly in the consultation and in on-going consultation. For many people who may never have left Wales, or even their village or county, undertaking an international exchange can be very challenging and often slightly overwhelming, so we offer shorter-term mobilities, as well as mobility opportunities in the UK for certain groups.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: What engagement have you had with the Scottish Government about that aspect of the scheme?

Elid Morris: We have had initial engagement with colleagues in the Scottish Government generally about the principles of the programme, and we are always willing to engage in further discussion and consultation. As Susana Galván said, now that a lot of the mobilities are starting to take place, a lot more data is coming in and we will be able to do more in-depth analysis of the participant profiles and the types of organisations that engage with the programme. We will be data rich—or richer—so we will be able to have more detailed conversations.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you. I appreciate that. I will move on to Liz Green, to ask some questions about youth work.

The big question for us is: what has the impact been of the Turing scheme requiring youth work

organisations to partner with other organisations in order to access support?

Liz Green: The impact of that has been that we cannot really access it. As far as I am aware, that was not even an option in the first couple of rounds. In the recent round, it was possible for a non-formal institution to apply in partnership. However, the scheme is not set up for youth work. It does not have opportunities for informal education programmes to make that youth work difference or to run a youth work programme through it. It does not seem to be accessible to the sector.

We put out a call to the sector to say that organisations could partner with somebody to apply, and we asked people to let us know if they had done so. I have not heard from anybody that they have done that, but that does not mean that no one has done it. Even if they could be successful, it probably feels very alien and inaccessible to organisations, particularly because the scheme was set up without youth work as a priority or even being mentioned.

We had feedback from the British Red Cross that, for its volunteering work, it partnered with a vocational education and training institution to make an application. However, it was unsuccessful, because it was trying to do it under traineeships, which does not really cover volunteering. That is my only example of an organisation that would have got funding through the youth strand of Erasmus+ trying to get funding from the Turing scheme but, unfortunately, being unsuccessful.

One aspect that we have not touched on yet—I hope that you will not mind if I take the opportunity to do so—is that, as well as young people's mobility, a significant benefit from Erasmus+ was the provision of professional learning opportunities for practitioners to learn from others, including through study visits, to innovate in their practice and to build their skills. That is not provided for at all in the Turing scheme, and it is hard to replace.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: You have highlighted a number of areas in which you think the Turing scheme is left wanting and on which you think the Scottish Government should maybe move. If the system were to be developed in Scotland, what would the key aspects be, and what would be critical to making it work for your sector?

Liz Green: There needs to be a ring-fenced youth work sector-specific strand, so that funding is available specifically for youth work. That should be designed in partnership with the youth work sector, and applications should be assessed by people with knowledge, understanding and experience of youth work so that they understand what the applications are trying to show and

achieve. Ideally, all the strands that were available through Erasmus+ would be covered, so there would be opportunities for youth mobility and practitioner mobility, as well as strategic partnerships, so that we could share what we have in Scotland, learn from others and innovate in our practice.

I am looking at our submission to the Government. It is critical that it is a two-way process—that it supports costs for mobility in both directions and that costs are provided to partners. Earlier, the point was made about the need to make the process attractive for partners, which was the case when they could go to Erasmus+.

In addition, there is an opportunity to reduce bureaucracy and to make the process accessible for grass-roots organisations, as was mentioned in the case with Taith. As part of that accessibility, there should be support for those organisations to apply to implement the programme and to report on it. That support should be provided locally by people who understand the programme and the youth work that is happening.

In the proposals that we submitted, we said that, as well as it being a very accessible programme, it should have a top-up inclusion fund, as I mentioned earlier, so that unforeseen costs would not be a barrier to participation—that is critical—and that funding should be included for staff time so that small organisations that cannot afford to do international exchange without their staff being paid for it could make the most of it and the young people involved could benefit from the amazing opportunities.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The inclusion fund that you mentioned earlier would be key to that.

Liz Green: Absolutely.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Would that fund be for people from underrepresented groups to use, or would it be used to meet some of the hidden costs? We have heard evidence from Colleges Scotland and others about the hidden costs of the scheme, such as double funding for staff to go over two different periods. Would that be part of the inclusion fund, or is that separate?

Liz Green: It would be important to build accessibility into the scheme so that it could reach groups that might have found it harder to access Erasmus+. I think that that needs to be built into the bones of what funding is available and how the scheme is administered and promoted.

One of the things that we found with Erasmus+ was that the grants were very rigid. It was possible to apply for things such as an accompanying carer or costs to get passports or suitcases for young people who did not have access to those things. It was fantastic that that could be built into the

proposal. However, once the young people had been recruited, if there was a young person with additional support needs who had not been on the original list, there was no way of ensuring that their support needs would be catered for.

There should be a top-up fund that could be accessed on an ad hoc basis so that every young person could take part, even if they might not have been part of the original proposal. That is what we meant by that. I feel that those costs—the costs of outreach and inclusion—should be built into the core of the programme initially, with the opportunity to top up where necessary.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you—that is much appreciated.

I have one other short question. You said in the evidence that you submitted that there could be opportunities with regard to education reform for the exchange programme that is developed. What opportunities would those be?

Liz Green: In the education reform process, it is critical that there is recognition within the broader formal educational context of the role of youth work as an informal educational practice. International exchange offers a really intensive mode of youth work. We have heard all the evidence about the way in which youth work is able to put young learners at the centre because it involves working with young people from where they are at. We are partners with them in their learning process.

Youth work is important for education reform, and Professor Ken Muir's report highlighted that. International youth work is one of the key ways to enable that reform to happen and to offer young people who would otherwise not get such opportunities an educational experience, in the broader sense, that involves exchange. It supports the youth work sector to facilitate that exchange and help with the wider ambition of the curriculum for excellence to be a holistic educational experience for young people.

10:00

Stephen Kerr: I address my questions to Liz Green in the first instance.

In March 2021, the Welsh Government said that it would have something ready to replace Erasmus+, and we have heard from witnesses this morning that it launched that replacement at the beginning of 2022. We also heard about the 5,000 participants, et cetera. It sounds like it has been a big success. What engagement have you had with the Scottish Government about the lack of anything like that in Scotland?

Liz Green: We have been working collaboratively with the team in the Scottish

Government that has been recruited to develop the programme, and we have been working with the CLD team.

Stephen Kerr: CLD?

Liz Green: The community learning and development team. That team worked closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and with Welsh Government colleagues on potential replacement programmes in the run up to the end of Erasmus+. We worked closely with them and ran stakeholder events with the youth work sector to identify the needs of the sector for a replacement scheme. A new team was then recruited into the Scottish Government to develop the—

Stephen Kerr: How many people are in the new team?

Liz Green: I do not know whether the team is all new. On the current team, I think that there is one manager and two policy officers, but I am not entirely sure.

We have been working with them since September 2021, which is when we first had contact with them about the youth work sector's aspirations for the new scheme. We submitted some proposals to them about that in January 2022, which I have included in the information that I shared with the committee, about what the youth work sector identifies as the key features of the youth work strand.

We had monthly meetings with the team, and they prepared proposals and a sector survey about the new programme, which we piloted across the—

Stephen Kerr: Have you seen details of a new programme?

Liz Green: No, I have not.

We piloted the sector survey by sending out the questions for a few people to test, and the youth work sector went above and beyond any other sector in our responses, because we are so keen to get a new programme.

Stephen Kerr: Have you seen the feedback on that survey?

Liz Green: That was just a pilot, and I have not seen the feedback. The full survey was due to go out last summer, but all the progress was paused.

Stephen Kerr: Paused?

Liz Green: Yes.

Stephen Kerr: What reason did the team give you for that pause?

Liz Green: The proposals that they had submitted were being reviewed because of the potential budget—

Stephen Kerr: By?

Liz Green: They were being reviewed by the minister and Government officials—I think. I am so sorry; it was a few months ago.

Stephen Kerr: No, that is okay. The information is very helpful.

Liz Green: Basically, they submitted proposals, which were being reviewed. Since then, the cost crisis hit; I presume that that has had an impact.

Stephen Kerr: So—

The Deputy Convener: Sorry, if I may, the committee can follow up with the Government on those points, because those are questions for the Government.

Stephen Kerr: I am asking these questions because I want to be able to understand YouthLink Scotland's assessment of where we are in Scotland. No one will be surprised to hear that I have already asked questions about this: I have asked how much money has been spent on it and what allocation of resource there has been. Just last week, I was told that no money has been spent on it. However, clearly some money has been spent because there have been those surveys. What is your assessment of where we are? When will we see anything on a Scottish equivalent to what they are doing so successfully in Wales?

Liz Green: I do not know, but we really hope that it will be soon.

Stephen Kerr: You would like to know.

Liz Green: We would really like to know. I have a quote from a practitioner about her ambitions for the Scottish exchange programme, which I will look for and share with you in a moment.

Work has been done preparing a proposal for a programme. That has stalled.

Stephen Kerr: Did that stall last summer?

Liz Green: It was maybe autumn. We were still having regular meetings until January or February 2023, although they have now been paused because there has been no progress for us to discuss.

Stephen Kerr: The challenge for us as parliamentarians is that we cannot see any progress reports and there are no minutes. I have been told that not a penny has been spent on it. Your assessment of the situation is very useful. Did you find the quote that you mentioned?

Liz Green: Yes, it is from Gillian McDiarmid, from Ocean Youth Trust Scotland, who recently took part in two professional development programmes that were funded by Erasmus+. She says:

“All we, as youth workers want is to make the world a better place for ourselves and the young people we work with, and exchange programmes help us try to achieve this. My hope for the near future is that the Scottish Government will fulfil their commitment to developing a Scottish Exchange programme and that the youth work sector will be at the forefront of this.

This experience made me fall back in love with youth work, others should have that same opportunity.”

Stephen Kerr: That is a good quote.

The Deputy Convener: Can we move on to questions for our colleagues, Mr Kerr?

Stephen Kerr: I have one last question about Scotland.

The Deputy Convener: One.

Stephen Kerr: Scotland is obviously my passion and interest.

You say that you were meeting monthly with the three people in the acquired team for the project. When did those meetings stop?

Liz Green: I believe that the last meeting that we had was in January or February this year. I do not know whether they are all new staff. They are part of the advanced learning and higher education team. Some of them will have worked previously on Erasmus+.

Stephen Kerr: You mean that they may or may not have been recruited to the project. We can ask the Scottish Government that question.

The Deputy Convener: There were several points to address there. Ms Green, I do not want you to feel that you are on the spot before the committee. If there are matters that you are uncertain about that you would like to clarify, given that you have already kindly agreed to follow up some points with written correspondence, you could make those clarifications then.

Mr Kerr, you have questions for our witnesses in Wales.

Stephen Kerr: Absolutely. I will turn my attention to Cardiff; I am sorry if this is slightly repetitious. We are interested to hear more about how you work collaboratively with the Turing scheme and how Welsh institutions engage with both Taith and Turing. Where are the overlaps and where are the points of strong collaboration?

Susana Galván: Eligible organisations that can apply for Turing can also apply for Taith funding. That is welcomed by Welsh institutions that can apply for both funding streams. However, as you

know, the youth sector is not in that position; as Liz Green said, youths cannot apply for Turing funding but can apply for Taith funding.

We have worked with the assessment strand of Turing to share notes about lessons learned and timelines to ensure that what we are doing in the assessment process aligns somewhat. For example, we have talked about the rates that we offer assessors, because we want to make sure that we are not completely out of kilter. We also look at Turing policy quite closely, to ensure that what Taith offers is not in direct competition but there is some alignment in policies and criteria, and that, at the same time, through consultation with the sectors, we fill gaps in Turing.

One piece of feedback from the Welsh sectors that also applied for Turing is that we can engage with them much more closely. Turing is a large scheme, which deals with many more organisations than we do in Wales, so that difference has been welcomed.

The Welsh Government works closely with the UK Government Department for Education and is closely involved in that level of dialogue on Turing. Our relationship is more at working level, in that we share notes and best practice and try to learn from each other.

Stephen Kerr: That is useful. What about Erasmus+? Do you still have a strong tie and a working relationship with the scheme, on the same aspects on which you collaborate with Turing?

Susana Galván: We do not have a working-relationship, but we have on-going dialogue. When Taith was being set up, the consultation with our sectors picked up a lot of learning from Erasmus+.

That said, we are part of a number of European networks of which Erasmus+ is also part. They discuss policy on mobility and international education for the various sectors that we work with. Through those networks, we can learn from programmes like Erasmus+ and others. For example, the Swiss have their own programme, which is, because it is smaller, more equivalent to what we do. We are trying to be seen as a funding agency in our own right so that we can bring something to the table, as well as learn from others.

I have been invited to speak on quite a number of international fora and have spoken on a panel with colleagues from Erasmus and Universities UK's international function, which spoke on behalf of Turing. We therefore have a policy and a collaborative approach to mobility.

Stephen Kerr: That is helpful. I will return to Scotland, which is the focus of our concern for a final question. There will, when we have our own

programme, be lots of opportunities for Scotland and Wales to work together in the future. Have you been consulted by the Scottish Government about ways in which we might, frankly, copy what you are doing?

Susana Galván: Our colleagues at the Welsh Government were in discussions with the Scottish Government when there were plans for a similar scheme for Scotland. At working level, especially in the initial months of setting up Taith last year, we also discussed that with the Scottish Government and shared our initial learning points and information on the structures that we were putting in place. As Elid Morris said, we are available and open to sharing our experiences—the good and the bad—and what we have learned during that process.

We were so glad to hear all that Liz Green said about her wish list, because we can tick all those boxes. We must ask how we can make a scheme that works for the sectors, particularly the less traditional ones. We know that mobility programmes work well for higher education, where people are experienced and have resources. However, how can we make a scheme work for sectors where there is less capacity, less understanding of how things work, and fewer people to deal with? We are available and are happy to share our story and what we have learned. We are still learning—there is a lot to review and improve on along the way—but ours is a positive story.

My final point is that mobility programmes been positive for the sectors that have access to funding. For example, in our first round of funding we disbursed money on applications for more than £10 million-worth of grants. The message that the programme sends to our international partners is about the commitment in Wales to international learning exchanges, to providing opportunities for young people and the staff who support them, and to promoting Wales as an internationalist nation that is open and outward looking. It is about putting Wales on the map, which has been good.

Stephen Kerr: That is what we want for Scotland.

The Deputy Convener: We will have a short supplementary from Pam Duncan-Glancy, then we will move to questions from Ivan McKee.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Susana, when did the Scottish Government last reach out to you?

10:15

Susana Galván: I am sorry—I am just looking to Elid Morris, who is sitting next to me. I think that it was in the initial months of the set-up of the programme. We had a few regular conversations

in spring last year—between March and before the beginning of the summer holiday—but since then we have had no further engagement.

The Deputy Convener: Just for clarification, is it correct that the Scottish Government was in touch with your colleagues in the Welsh Government?

Susana Galván: Obviously, the Welsh Government has a relationship with the Scottish Government, but I do not know how regular the conversations are or when they last took place.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you. I call Ivan McKee.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I have questions on the cost of the Taith scheme. First, I am interested in hearing about the £65 million that the Welsh Government has allocated over four years. I do not know how much background you will have on this, but I am keen to understand the thinking behind that number and what it covers. Have comparisons been made with what the UK Government is putting into the Turing scheme, which I believe is round about £100 million each year, and the relative costs of Erasmus? Have you had to make decisions about what should or should not be included, given budgetary constraints?

Elid Morris: As Susana Galván has said, the scheme is worth £65 million and, at the moment, is funded up to the end of March 2027. The majority of that funding—around £58 million—is for grant funding; we operate the mobilities on what we term pathways, and £46 million of that money will be for mobilities and associated activities.

The funding package includes funding for a discrete programme called the global Wales programme. It is now in its third phase and is a partnership for higher and further education that focuses on raising the visibility of Wales in student recruitment and partnership, and we manage it from the £65 million. The remaining funds are for the separate Cardiff University company that, as Susana Galván said, we have had to set up. An endeavour of such scale does not come without staffing resources requirements and requirements for technical aspects and platforms that enable us to run the programme.

The £65 million was awarded by the Welsh Government on the basis of calculations that it made of the equivalent benefit to Wales from Erasmus, so the funding is on a similar scale. As I have said, the majority of the funding is for the awards that we make to eligible third-party organisations. We have an annual conversation with the Welsh Government about what amounts should be ring fenced for which sectors.

Ivan McKee: That was very helpful. On the surface of it—and obviously without understanding the detail of what is or is not included—I think that it looks, pro rata, to be a much more significant investment than the UK Government has put into Turing. Indeed, it seems to be three or four times as large. It would be helpful to understand how that would play into the Scottish context with regard to the costs of a scheme here.

My next question is a more open one. What will be the next steps for Taith? Where do you see the programme going, based on what you have learned over the past year or so? Is there scope to develop or change the programme in any way? *[Interruption.]* I think that you are on now, Susana.

Susana Galván: I am sorry—I am not allowed to touch the microphone.

On where the programme goes from here, the Welsh Government's funding commitment currently runs from 2022 to 2026. That is the funding envelope, with a wrap-up period going to March 2027. As Elid Morris has said, as data from projects starts to come in, we will need to make sure that the programme is meeting its objectives and that inclusion and access are at the very heart of it.

We must make sure that we are not complacent in that respect, and that as soon as we analyse the data and identify potential gaps, we are bold enough, as a programme, to implement changes and adjustments to processes and policies to ensure that we meet the objectives, while also listening to feedback from the sectors. Liz Green alluded to our asking whether the processes are too complicated and whether we can simplify some to make it easier for smaller organisations; whether can we offer better packages of support to organisations to reach the programme; and whether we are reaching out widely enough across Wales, especially in areas of deprivation.

There is constant evolution of the programme—we see it as a project that is alive. The setting up was really difficult, but I think that the task of making sure that we deliver on the objectives is even harder. A big measure of success for us will be—which I hope for—a commitment from the Welsh Government to continue the programme beyond 2026. That would be the best testament to the programme's having been successful, having delivered its objectives and, ultimately, having provided life-changing opportunities to its participants.

You will see on our website that we have started to develop an area called "Stories". Numbers and targets are really important but, at the end of the day, it is the human stories behind the numbers that really tell us what is going on. We hope to start sharing those stories in the next year. It is

ultimately all about the human impact—how the programme is delivering life-changing opportunities, and participants sharing those opportunities with everyone.

Ivan McKee: That is absolutely right. The point that you made about putting Wales more firmly on the map with regard to international recognition is also hugely important.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Good morning, everyone.

I will pick up on the progress that we need to make here in Scotland in order to introduce and create a Scottish equivalent of what our friends in Wales have managed to achieve. So far this morning, we have heard about a survey that has gone out to our youth organisations, and we have heard that there were frequent meetings until February or March. I understand that there have been a few changes, but are you able to tell the committee whether it would be helpful if those meetings reconvened?

It would be good to have our youth organisations back around the table talking about the matter openly, to encourage the Government to move ahead and get a programme up and running. We are now halfway through 2023, so I am a little bit worried that it is now a slowed process. Liz Green, is it likely that we will be able to launch a programme similar to that of our friends in Wales, given the timeframes that we are now up against?

Liz Green: On your first question, we are in regular contact with the Government team, although meetings have been cancelled, so we have paused them. We are always happy to sit around the table and to offer support, and we are happy to get the survey out to the whole youth sector when doing so is relevant, in order to bring the sector's voice into design of the programme.

However, it seems to me that the Government team's hands are tied—it has been waiting a long time. I would be very happy to meet the team, but I am not sure how purposeful that would be until it is in a position to move on the programme and do some development. All its communication over the past approximately six months has been to say, "We're just waiting". We would love to have meetings if the team can do something.

On how likely a programme launch is, I cannot answer that, although I am really hopeful that we can work together to make it happen. The youth work sector is absolutely crying out for programme. The longer we wait, the more young people are missing out on opportunities, the more tenuous our relationships and connections with previous partners become, and the less confidence Scottish organisations have to do international exchange.

I do not have the answer to the question, but we are really happy to work hard with the committee; I know that the rest of the sector is, too. As I was on my way here, I was getting messages saying, “Oh, please can you include this?” or “Please send this in your follow up,” so the sector is extremely keen to make this happen and will work very closely with the committee and Government to make it happen, if it is possible.

Meghan Gallacher: I think that we have heard that through your contributions so far.

Has the Government team explained what it is waiting for? Is it waiting for the green light to create the policy and get it approved in Parliament? Why are we somewhat stuck in limbo on this? I am really keen to try to move things along; I think that colleagues around the table feel the same.

Liz Green: As far as I know, the team is waiting to find out whether a budget—and, if so, how much—might be allocated to the programme and whether the proposals that it has submitted so far are acceptable and viewed well. , I am sorry, but that is all the detail that I have about what the team is waiting for.

Meghan Gallacher: That is fine—thank you very much, Liz. I have one question for our friends on the Taith team.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you. I will just comment on that point first. Liz, it is likely that the committee will follow that up with the Government after this evidence session. Of course, a hiatus in correspondence does not necessarily mean that work is not happening in the civil service.

Liz Green: Yes, absolutely.

The Deputy Convener: That is what we will try to establish through follow-up communication.

Liz Green: The team has sought our views and the views of the sector, and it is definitely trying to bring us along with it on crafting proposals that are appropriate for youth work and for young people. We have had really positive collaborative working with the team, until things stalled.

The Deputy Convener: That is great to hear, and that is what we would hope and expect. Thank you. I will hand back to Meghan Gallacher for questions to our witnesses in Wales.

Meghan Gallacher: Thank you, convener. It is helpful that, if we have got a date of September 2025, that is the date that we work towards. It is imperative that we try to work together to realise this by that date.

I will move to questions to our Taith colleagues. I am so keen to hear about all the work that you have been doing in relation to the programme and the success that you have had thus far. What

advice could you offer to us here in Scotland about setting up a similar programme? Do you have any advice for Scottish institutions on how they could expand their international exchange programmes, too?

Susana Galván: Thank you. We feel humbled to be asked for advice. Obviously, we would not dare to tell you what to do or give advice, but we can tell you what is important for us in case that helps in any way.

Liz Green has touched on many of the points that I would make. Making a programme that is inclusive of all learning sectors has been a real benefit for us, so you could ensure that you include all learning sectors, including adult learning, for example. We have talked about youths and schools, of course, but I want to highlight adult learning as a sector. It has felt a bit excluded from the game and bringing it in as part of Taith has been positive.

The consultation and engagement piece has been critical for us. It is never perfect—you cannot please absolutely everybody, and there are always lots of dynamics within sectors and organisations. At the end of the day, you are talking about funding, but consultation and engagement from the outset have been critical for us—making sure that we talked to the sectors. Liz talked about understanding the sectors, bringing their expertise, knowledge and experience to the mix and using that to build a programme that works for them.

The reciprocal aspect has been mentioned many times as an example of best practice—the fact that the funding allows not just for outward mobility but for mobility into Wales.

The programme allows for mobility not just of learners—I am just repeating what Liz said—but of staff, including academics, administrators and teachers. We can look at the learning sectors as an ecosystem of people who can access those opportunities.

For us, the technical aspect of running a funding agency is really important—all the operational aspects. We are talking about public funds so our systems are transparent and compliant. We can justify them and defend them confidently, because we have a strong governance structure of reporting and so on—everything is properly documented. We know that, if we were challenged, we could defend the system appropriately.

The other element, which is as important, is the human element—constant engagement with the sectors, never taking anything for granted and approaching the programme with an open mind. You set up a programme based on assumptions that you make at the beginning and, of course, as soon as you start delivering, those assumptions

change and you need an open mind to review and adjust as you go along.

10:30

The inclusion and access aspect is important to us in making a programme that is truly accessible and inclusive. We need to keep that at the forefront of our minds and, moving forward, we need to be brave enough to make adjustments if they are needed. If we need to tighten policies or criteria to meet those objectives, we do so.

While I am speaking, I would say to Liz Green that she is welcome to come and talk to us. We have programme managers within the team who specialise in the different sectors. Their role is 100 per cent to work with the sectors and to have that level of knowledge and expertise about them. We would also be happy to connect you with a lead for the youth sector to tell you a little bit about that experience. As I say, we are here to share any learning. We are, of course, very proud of it.

This is a personal opinion and maybe it is controversial, but my personal point of view is that the funding being given to a brand new agency rather than an existing large organisation is a positive thing. It has brought in people with a brand new and fresh mindset. We are all new to the team. We all come with great passion and different levels of knowledge and expertise. I worked for the British Council for 25 years previously and I think that a fresh start with a fresh team has been positive because we all come with an open mind, which has been really good. That is my personal view.

Meghan Gallacher: Thank you so much for that summary—funding, governance, inclusion, youth organisation involvement, the focus on young people and being flexible. There is a lot that we can learn from that.

Liz Green: I just want to add a little bit more flesh to what Susana Galván said about involving the sectors. We are in regular contact with our counterpart in Wales, the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services. It is part of the sector organising body or consortium. When Susana Galván talks about the sector being involved, we are not talking just about consultation. Youth work infrastructure bodies are involved in the delivery of the programme by getting grass-roots youth organisations to apply and supporting them through that journey. Susana Galván or Elid Morris will correct me if I am wrong, but that is built in to the infrastructure and governance of Taith. One of their staff is also a representative on the governance board. It is not just a consultation; it is built in, and that is a strength.

There is something else that we can learn. It is good to hear that Wales is looking at changing the

grant amounts during the next year with the cost of living because, as Paul Glaze said in his feedback, the significant cost crisis and change of costs mean that a lot of funded programmes are not able to deliver within their original budget because things are just so much more expensive. We in Scotland will need to be cognisant of that and make provision for it. It is great to hear that you are able to change the grants based on the context.

The Deputy Convener: In a similar way, I am interested in anything that Susana Galván wants to elaborate on. You talked about the stories that you are collecting, but is an assessment of the student experience being carried out? Are you taking on student feedback to inform how Taith will be funded in due course?

Susana Galván: As part of the reporting, monitoring and evaluation process, beneficiary organisations need to report to us on a regular basis not only on the financial aspects of managing the programme but on the programme and its impacts. There will also be participant surveys where will get data from the participants directly on their experience.

One of the conditions of our grant agreement letter with the Welsh Government is that there will be an independent evaluation of the Taith programme. That is part of the conditions of the grant. That is opened up to an independent tender process where external evaluators will do an in-depth evaluation of the programme and the impact of the grants.

The Deputy Convener: Do members have any further questions?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you for indulging me with a final question, convener. My question is for our colleagues in Wales. Am I right in saying that, in the time since Erasmus closed, you have been able to develop a system, policies, procedures and relationships, set up an organisation and deliver for all the students you have spoken about? If that is the case, do you have any sense of why the Scottish Government has not been able to do the same thing?

Susana Galván: The answer to the first question is yes. We have been able to set up and deliver all that and, as I said, we constantly review the success of the programme when we make adjustments to make sure that we are on track.

I would not be able to answer the question of why the Scottish Government has not developed a similar programme—I do not know why. I know that there seemed to be plans to establish a new programme and, as I said, we talked to the Scottish Government to share some of our experience in the early months, but we have not been approached since summer last year.

The Deputy Convener: Stephanie Callaghan is online and has a question.

Stephanie Callaghan: I have a quick one for colleagues in Wales. You spoke about wanting to be truly inclusive, and there was some discussion earlier about the extra costs that can be involved for carers and so on. When you look at the funding, are you setting a proportion aside to tackle that stuff, or does the funding follow the numbers of people who are benefiting?

The Deputy Convener: Who wants to answer that question? Can Susana Galván or Elid Morris come in on that?

Susana Galván: Sorry, would you mind repeating the question? Someone came into the room and distracted us.

Stephanie Callaghan: Not at all. You spoke about how important being truly inclusive is, and we heard earlier about how there can be additional costs for carers and so on. When you look at the funding, do you portion that up to start with and look at what will be allocated to that type of work, or does the funding follow the numbers of people that you want to support?

Susana Galván: There are two elements to that. At the time of application, organisations that apply for Taith funding need to demonstrate that they will make a commitment to some of the cross-cutting commitments of the programme, one of which is achieving a number of participants from underrepresented groups. At the point of application, they need to provide evidence that that will happen, and they need to quantify that at the application stage.

The grant includes travel rates, assistance rates and organisational support rates. There is also a 100 per cent inclusion support rate for participants with additional learning needs, people with disabilities and participants from disadvantaged backgrounds to cover costs such as applying for a passport or getting proper clothes for a change of climate or travelling to airports. Organisations will indicate those numbers at the application stage, so the initial grant calculations will take them into account. However, going back to Liz Green's point, sometimes it can be difficult to provide an accurate number at application stage. Throughout the life of a project, organisations can make change requests and ask for additional funding when they have the actual number of such participants. Inclusion costs are uplifted on a 100 per cent basis. We have embedded flexibility into the programme so that organisations can notify us about that throughout the life of the project.

Stephanie Callaghan: That is clear and very helpful. Thank you.

The Deputy Convener: Before we conclude, do any witnesses want to make any points that they have not been able to raise in response to questions? Have you covered everything that you wanted to convey?

Liz Green: I think that I have covered the importance of the opportunities for young people and the significant loss of Erasmus+, which we are not able to replace easily without support from a Scottish educational exchange programme. I hope that I have highlighted the workforce development challenges and the fact that, without a source of workforce development funding, it is challenging to access opportunities.

I will highlight two further aspects that we are missing. The ecosystem of Erasmus+ would be difficult to replicate in Scotland, but we would want to find ways to tap into it. Around the youth strand for Erasmus+, there is a network of support, advanced learning and training opportunities—SALTOs—which are centres of expertise in different elements of youth work and informal education. They offer training opportunities and a range of different networks and training programmes. When I looked through the funding results from Taith, I saw that one group had applied for funding to put trainers through a European training programme so that they could bring that learning back to Wales. I would be keen for us to find ways to tap into the European ecosystem with a new programme that would allow us to make the most of it, because it is wonderful and there are so many opportunities. For example, Movetia in Switzerland funds people to go on SALTO programmes when they cannot get funding through Erasmus+. They still have Swiss participants through that funding. I would want to see us trying to tap into opportunities such as that.

Finally, I will mention strategic partnerships. I know that Taith has built in pathway 2—I hope that I have that right—for strategic partnerships in the sector. I will give an example and will send the case study to the committee. YouthLink Scotland led a strategic partnership with seven partners in six different countries between 2017 and 2019 on developing digital youth work. It was an opportunity to build training resources, capacity and good practice for the youth work sector on developing digital youth work. We did not know at the time that that would have a significant impact on the sector's ability in Scotland to pivot to deliver the online youth work that was critical for young people throughout the pandemic. Through the strategic partnership and the funding from Erasmus+, we were able to prepare training resources and practice examples for the sector. I think that I trained 200 practitioners in the first six weeks of lockdown and we trained almost 1,000 people during the first six months of the Covid

pandemic. Having had the opportunity to work with European partners to innovate on what youth work practice was going to look like in future and to be able to use those resources, we were able to equip the sector to deliver for young people at a critical time. We would not have been able to do that without funding.

Susana Galván: It has been a great pleasure to present evidence to the committee. We feel proud of what we have achieved. I have not said this before, but we are grateful to be under one of the universities in Wales, because it has provided structure and facilitated the process of accessing systems, such as information technology, finance and human resources, which accelerated the company's set-up process. It is a learning process, but it is a positive story for Wales. What we are doing very much aligns with the Welsh Government's international strategy, so the message is consistent. We look forward to making Taith a permanent feature, I hope, in the Welsh ecosystem.

The Deputy Convener: We really appreciate you sharing your insights and thoughts. Thank you for your time.

10:45

Meeting continued in private until 11:31.

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