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Taith Evaluation

Inception Stage Evaluation

Executive Summary

Taith

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Introduction

Taith is a £65 million all-Wales programme funded by the Welsh Government, which grants funding to undertake international exchange activities provided through the Taith Pathways programme to external organisations from every education sector in Wales:

- Schools
- Youth
- Adult Education (AE)
- Further Education
- Vocational Education and Training (FE-VET)
- Higher Education (HE)

Alongside this, Taith also funds the Global Wales III programme which is delivered by Universities Wales and has a bespoke set of activities focusing on promoting the Welsh HE and FE sectors. Through this activity, the programme aims to attract international students and create collaboration opportunities with international partners.

Wavehill were commissioned in August 2023 to conduct an inception stage evaluation of Taith to:

- Establish the theory of change for the programme
- Develop an evaluation framework for subsequent stages

- Conduct a review of the programme's monitoring system alongside support to develop new tools and implement improvements
- Provide an initial assessment of delivery performance

A separate report has been developed for Global Wales with this report focusing primarily on the Pathways programme and other Taith activity.

The main purpose of the Inception Stage was to set up the monitoring and evaluation for subsequent stages.

Building on the inception stage, the Stage 2 interim evaluation (delivered in 2024) will review delivery and management processes and report on progress against the outputs and outcomes as well as a value for money assessment. It will include recommendations to inform the ongoing delivery

The Stage 3 final evaluation, delivered by December 2026, will assess whether the programme has delivered its intended outputs and outcomes. It will consider overall impact and identify any lessons learned for future policy and strategy.
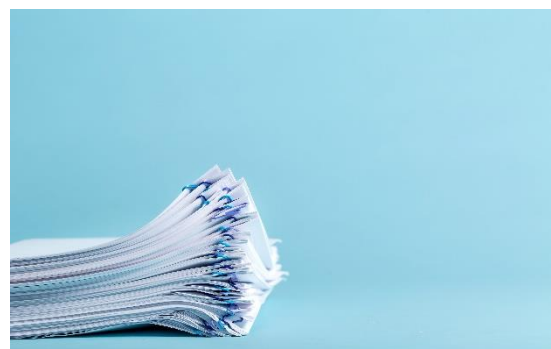
Supporting evidence

Our policy review found that Taith contributes to a range of strategic Welsh Government educational and youth priorities:

- **'Our National Mission'** which places tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment at its core (Taith has a significant focus on engaging underrepresented groups).
- **Curriculum for Wales** – particularly with its emphasis on supporting learners to become ambitious, creative, confident, and informed citizens.
- **Strategic Vision for Tertiary Education** and **Youth Work Strategy for Wales**.

Beyond these educational / youth priorities, there is also clear alignment with the ambitions set out in the **International Strategy** and the **Wellbeing of Future Generations Act** around raising Wales' profile and supporting a globally responsible Wales.

Our review of the research literature found that international exchange programmes have often not been equitable, thus supporting Taith's drive to aggressively target engagement from underrepresented groups.

There was mixed evidence on the outcomes generated for learners from these programmes. While research studies have shown correlations between participation in the programmes and improved academic and career-related outcomes, language proficiency, soft skills and cultural awareness, there is a lack of conclusive evidence to determine

causality. That said, these interventions are widely believed to have a positive impact while there is also evidence of positive professional development and educational outcomes from staff participation.

Monitoring Review

A series of 38 recommendations are made in our detailed review regarding the changes that should be made to current monitoring processes. These have been synthesized into five points:

- Ensure that data collection tools are designed to support programme evaluation – data storage tools often served other functions (e.g. managing financial information) meaning that they had not been designed with consideration for accessing or measuring project outputs.
- Improve consistency of data capture and alignment with Theory of Change (see below) – occasional lack of alignment with targets, lack of precise definitions and consistent terminology.
- Streamline data collection – some of the data storage files could be automated and some aspects of reporting could be streamlined.
- Improve processes for reflection on delivery to support model development – valuable qualitative information is being captured but could be better utilised.
- Provision of participant survey tools to capture outcomes data for Taith – this addresses the main gap within the programme's monitoring.

Theory of Change

A Theory of Change has been developed for Taith to support the development of the Evaluation Framework. It does this by summarising what the programme is attempting to achieve as its end goal, what type of outcomes would be needed in the interim to achieve that goal, and thus what indicators can be used to measure success.

Rationale
• The rationale for Taith is threefold: first, the perception that international learning exchanges provide important benefits for learners, staff and organisations; second, a new programme was needed to replace Erasmus+ and make up for the perceived deficiencies within Turing; and third, a bespoke Welsh programme was needed to deliver against Welsh objectives. • The programme (particularly through the Global Wales III element) also responds to the benefit from institutions within the HE and FE sectors in Wales working collectively to promote the sectors' interests abroad, including to generate greater export earnings for the sectors, who have been operating in an economically challenging period, and generate soft power benefits for Wales.

Inputs & Resources
• £65m WG investment and team of ca. 37 Taith staff (including 17 for Global Wales III)
• Input from the Taith Advisory Board/ILEP Ltd Board/Sector Stakeholder Groups
• Experience of Erasmus+ delivery

Activities	Outputs	Intermediate outcomes one	Intermediate outcomes two	Overall impacts

• Design and ongoing development of key processes
• Arranging Pathways calls for funding
• Funding of Global Wales III
• Support for applicants
	• 15,000 unique outward and 10,000 unique inward participants split by participant type and mobility type:
	  ○ Pathway 1 learner mobilities (group, individual, virtual)
	  ○ Pathway 1 staff mobilities (e.g. placements, shadowing, training and professional development, best practice and innovation, research placements, exploratory visits, networking and
		Learners
		• Intercultural awareness and understanding of Welsh culture
		• Self-empowerment, increased motivation to learn
		• Increased resilience, self-esteem and confidence (e.g. to try new things, socialise with new people,
			Learners
			• Improvement to degree attainment
			• Improvement to their employability and career prospects
			• Building their sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
			• Greater earning power
				• More culturally aware citizens
				• More vibrant & culturally integrated Wales
				• Improved Wales' profile

• Taith Champion sector support
• Appraisal and grant awards
• Ongoing support for grant recipients including monthly drop-in sessions, support webinars, and quarterly grant recipient meetings
• Monitoring and data collection
• Promotional activity and outreach work: workshops, events, 1-2-1 mentoring
• Governance: meetings and reporting
• Stakeholder meetings
	collaboration, prep visits)
	• Pathway 2 projects and mobilities
	   o Number of partnerships with international partners
	   o Number of networking and/or cross-sector learning activity within Wales
	   o Number of project outputs
	• 50 multi-annual partnerships established
	• 40 countries involved
	• 40% of participants are underrepresented including 20% that are disadvantaged, 10% Disabled or ALN, and 10% ethnic minority
	• % of participants that have not previously engaged in international exchanges / travelled abroad
	• Global Wales III KPIs – events, partnerships, scholarships, SiW marketing inputs etc.
		leave local area etc.)
		• Linguistic skills
		
		Educational staff
		• Understanding of social, linguistic and cultural diversity
		• Increased knowledge of theory and practice in education internationally
		• New ideas, teaching methods
		• Professional and career development
		• Linguistic skills
		
		Grant recipients
		• New ideas, research and innovation
		• Organisational, professional and academic links
		• New partnerships
		• Improved student recruitment from priority markets
			Staff
			• Teaching, training, research, facilitation and professional skills
			
			Grant recipients
			• Ability to participate in international programmes
			• Improved teaching and learning
			• Reputation and international standing
			• Delivery against civic mission
			• Increased export earnings
				globally
				• Improved educational offer in Wales
				• Taith becomes embedded in the educational landscape
				• HE and FE institutions develop greater financial sustainability

Assumptions	Barriers	Facilitators
• Underrepresented groups and new organisations want to participate • International exchanges will generate social and economic benefits for learners • International exchanges will provide relevant and beneficial experiences for educational staff • Grant recipients will embed learning within organisation and share learning with others • International partners and learners will have a positive experience of Wales	• Failure to engage underrepresented groups • Grant recipients failing to collect the data and record underrepresented participants • Failure to engage harder to reach organisations • Sector bodies feel that they don't have sufficient resource allocated to their sector / hold sufficient influence, and lack of resource within Taith team to engage each sector sufficiently, thus leading to limited reach • Taith funds opportunities that could be provided by other schemes (e.g. Turing) • External challenges (e.g. inflation, cost of living, Brexit, changes in the geopolitical landscape)	• Taith Champions' role in engaging hard to reach groups • Strong customer service offer from the Taith team • Embedding question on engaging underrepresent groups within the application form • Engage sector representatives through the Advisory Board and Sector Stakeholder Groups • Question within application form to discourage double funding • Financial support for exceptional costs, including for disadvantaged groups

Evaluation Framework

The Framework presented below demonstrates how each evaluation objective and question will be addressed in subsequent phases by presenting the indicators that will be used (drawing on the Theory of Change) and how relevant data will be collected.

Evaluation Objective	Sub Questions	Indicators	Methods / Data Sources	Timescales
Examine the effectiveness of programme governance, management and delivery processes	• How is the programme's governance structured? • Are there clear roles and responsibilities for the range of stakeholders? • Are the programme's goals and objectives well-defined and aligned to the Welsh Government priorities? • Is the governance structure appropriate to enable effective decision making and resource allocation? • Are the delivery processes (in relation to grant awards, grant management and claims) appropriate? • Are the governance mechanisms in place to ensure programme processes are followed? • How is programme data and information managed, and how is it used for decision-making? • What are the perceptions of grant recipients on the programme's management?	• Grant recipient satisfaction levels with management of the programme • Participant satisfaction with the mobility • Stakeholder perceptions of the management and governance of the programme • Delivery and management staff perceptions of the management and governance of the programme • Number of projects that utilise sustainable travel options • Number of projects that focus on promoting the Welsh language	• Review of programme documentation • Review of programme management information • Delivery and management team interviews • Grant recipient and stakeholder interviews	Interim and Final

Evaluation Objective	Sub Questions	Indicators	Methods / Data Sources	Timescales

Understand the scale and scope of outputs delivered by the Taith programme	• What is the profile of participants, staff and organisations accessing the programme?
	• How successful has the programme been in reaching participants from disadvantaged backgrounds?
	• To what extent has the programme reached participants that otherwise wouldn't have been internationally mobile?
		Outputs
		• Number of P1 and P2 projects, by sector
		   o Number of applications for P1 and P2 projects, by sector
		• Number of unique outward mobilities
		• Number of unique inward mobilities
		• Number of partnerships established
		• Number of countries involved
		• Profile characteristics of participants:
		   o % that are disabled
		   o % from an ethnic minority background
		   o % from a disadvantaged background
		   o % that had not previously engaged in international exchanges
		   o % that had not previously travelled abroad
		   o % that are in the lowest two WIMD quintiles
			• Review of programme documentation
			• Review of programme management information
			• Delivery and management team interviews
			• Grant recipient and stakeholder interviews
			• Participant focus groups
			• Observational research with participants
				Interim and Final

| Evaluation Objective	Sub Questions	Indicators	Methods / Data Sources	Timescales
		• Types of educational organisations o % that had not previously engaged in international exchanges • Number of research mobility / P2 networking and/or cross-sector learning activity within Wales (e.g. events, conferences, workshops, training sessions, or online resource sharing) • Number of P2 project outputs		

Assess the extent to which Taith has achieved positive outcomes for learners, educational staff and educational organisations	• What outcomes have been generated for learners:
	   o Linguistic skills
	   o Employability and career prospects
	   o Intercultural awareness
	   o Self-empowerment, self-esteem and motivation
	   o Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
	   o Academic engagement/performance
	• What outcomes have been generated for staff:
		Learners: self-reported improvements to:
		• Soft skills (communication, teamwork, creativity, sense of initiative)
		• Increased self-esteem and confidence (e.g. to try new things, socialise with new people, leave local area etc.)
		• Self-empowerment, increased motivation to learn
		• Language skills
		• Intercultural awareness (e.g. confidence to travel abroad,
			Programme Data
			• Review of programme documentation
			• Review of programme management information
			Primary Research
			• Delivery and management team interviews
			• Stakeholder interviews
				Interim and Final (long-term indicators will be explored during the final stage only)

Evaluation Objective	Sub Questions	Indicators	Methods / Data Sources	Timescales
	o Social, linguistic and cultural diversity o Connection between formal and non-formal education o Opportunities for professional and career development o Improvements to teaching, training, research and professional skills • What outcomes have been generated for organisations: o Capacity and knowledge to participate in international programmes o Reputation and international standing o Teaching and learning o Development of educational practice o Student recruitment and new research partnerships • To what extent have the overall objectives for the programme been achieved?	interest in other cultures, understanding of Welsh culture etc.) • Academic engagement/performance (Schools, FE, HE, AE only) • Career prospects (Schools, FE, HE, AE only) • Community engagement (Schools, Youth and AE only) **Staff: self-reported improvements to:** • Knowledge of theory and practice in education internationally o % learning new methods • Educational practices o % reporting changes o % reporting improvements • Professional and career development • Teaching, training, research and professional skills	• Grant recipient interviews • Education staff feedback • Participant focus groups • Observational research with participants **Secondary Data** • HESA data on international student recruitment • WG data	

Evaluation Objective	Sub Questions	Indicators	Methods / Data Sources	Timescales

		Grant recipients (self-reported)
		• Increased engagement in international programmes
		    ◦ % reporting increased awareness, knowledge, and capability
		    ◦ % engaged that had not engaged in similar activity before
		    ◦ % that intend to continue engaging with international exchange programmes
		• Increase in number of research partnerships
		• % embedding new learning within their organisation
		• % disseminating learning to other organisations
		• % reporting delivery against civic mission
		
		Potential long-term indicators
		• % in graduate-level job compared with non-mobile participants (HE only)
		• % earning a first class or upper second-class degree		

Evaluation Objective	Sub Questions	Indicators	Methods / Data Sources	Timescales
		compared with non-mobile participants (HE only) • % gaining full time employment compared with non-mobile participants • % that remain in education or employment compared with non-mobile participants (Schools, Youth only) • Evidence of greater earning power • Evidence of greater entrepreneurship		
Undertake a value for money assessment of Taith, taking account of the different types and durations of mobilities provided through the programme	To what extent has Taith represented good value for money?	The VfM assessment model will be refined at the beginning of the interim stage following a workshop session with the Taith executive. The model will draw on the 'Four E's' approach[1] to examine performance in relation to: • Economy: the cost of resources used or required (inputs) i.e. how much is being spent/spending the least possible? • Efficiency: the relationship between output from goods or services and the resources to produce them i.e. spending well	Interim and Final

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[1] This approach is used by the National Audit Office and has been developed by Oxford Policy Management (OPM) and evaluation specialist Julian King.

Evaluation Objective	Sub Questions	Indicators	Methods / Data Sources	Timescales
		• Effectiveness: the relationship between intended and actual results of spending (outcomes) i.e. spending wisely • Equity: the extent to which services are available to and reach all people that they are intended to; i.e. spending fairly • Cost-effectiveness: comparing the outcome or impact to the total cost; i.e. was it worth it? An assessment will be made against each of these as well as an overall objective judgement on the value for money of the programme based on the evidence gathered.		
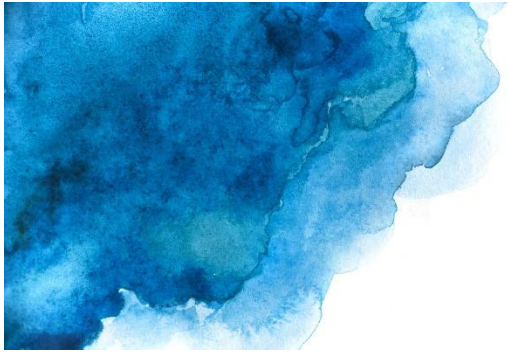
Conclusions and Recommendations

At this inception stage we have found that the rationale for the Taith programme is sound, based on the premise that international exchange programmes provide valuable opportunities for participants. Equally, we note a lack of robust evidence to demonstrate the causal relationship between the programme and educational outcomes for participants. This presents an opportunity for Taith to strengthen the body of evidence in understanding the impact of international exchange programmes.

Whilst our review of the monitoring data shows that Taith has generally been effective in capturing output data, we have made several recommendations (39 in total) to strengthen the programme's approach moving forward.

Recommendation 1: The Taith team should review the long list of recommendations made as part of our monitoring review and implement improvements where possible.

The main issue has been the lack of outcomes data. This was highlighted by stakeholders as the programme's main weakness. Whilst there was an expectation for grant recipients to develop their own tools to capture outcome data from participants – this approach has not been effective and is not sufficient to be able to demonstrate the difference that the programme has made. Rather, the programme needs a robust and standardised set of data capture tools that can demonstrate whether the programme has achieved the outcomes outlined within the Theory of Change.

Recommendation 2: Taith, with support from Wavehill, will need to develop tools that can capture quantitative outcome data from participants. This will be supplemented by additional research activity through the external evaluation during the interim and final phases.

Delivery performance

Whilst the main emphasis at this inception stage has been to plan the evaluation, we were also able to draw on some emerging themes from the stakeholder consultations and monitoring review to provide an initial assessment of delivery performance. The evidence collected to date suggests that Taith has been delivered reasonably effectively, with the programme maturing and increasingly forging its own identity around a core ethos of ensuring it is as accessible as possible and breaks new ground in the type of organisations and participants engaged.

It recognises that the intervention is most impactful for people who would not be able to take part in these activities ordinarily, and thus the desire to engage underrepresented groups is a key, strategic objective. Whilst several steps have been taken in order to engage those groups, the programme was below its

target and recognises that more can be done to target the support at underrepresented participants. The decision to introduce a minimum threshold within the application process should help to secure greater engagement from underrepresented groups.

Additionally, Taith has also introduced a mandatory requirement for grant recipients to provide data with regards to participants' underrepresented status, thereby addressing some of the gaps that currently exist. We also make the following recommendations to strengthen engagement with these groups further:

Recommendation 3: The new Taith Champion role to replace the Sector Organising Bodies has coincided with a new and explicit focus on targeting their outreach work towards engaging underrepresented organisations and participants. This is to be welcomed. However, we would recommend that the programme undertake a more thorough evaluation of their performance, addressing some of the weaknesses in the evaluation of the Sector Organising Bodies which did not consider the additionality of their outputs and outcomes.

Recommendation 4: Taith should consider allowing more funding for overheads to pay for staff time in arranging the mobilities, and thereby ensuring that grant recipients do not lose money from their participation in the programme. This would help to ensure it is more accessible to smaller organisations and those operating in areas of disadvantage.

Whilst Taith is performing very well against its output target for outward mobilities, the ambition for inward

mobilities does not look feasible at present. The programme will not be able to achieve the target under the current set up whereby only 30% of projects costs are allowed to be spent on inward mobilities, and yet 62% of mobilities going forward would need to be inward to meet the target.

Recommendation 5: A different approach is needed if the outward to inward mobility target ratio remains the same. In that scenario, Taith will need to prioritise inward mobilities in the next rounds of funding and will need to change the condition on project costs to do so. In the first instance, however, Taith and the Welsh Government should agree whether these targets should change to place more emphasis on outward mobilities.

We also note that there was a perception among stakeholders that Taith has been disproportionately focused on HE through its delivery and governance structures. We note that substantial efforts have already been made on making the programme work for non-HE sectors. However, some stakeholders questioned the amount of funding allocated to HE (we note that this was stipulated by Welsh Government with commitments made in the Grant Agreement letter) and felt that, despite the changes made following the governance review, that the HE sector had a disproportionate amount of influence within the new arrangements (particularly through the ILEP Board).

Recommendation 6: The Taith team should consider whether changes can be made to ensure that non-HE sectors have a greater input with regards to the governance, delivery, and strategic direction of the programme.

Finally, the main challenge by far for Global Wales III has been to accommodate the monitoring and reporting requirements set by Taith. They believe that this has taken considerable delivery time away from the team and has caused some significant issues.

Recommendation 7: Taith should consider whether any steps can be taken to streamline the monitoring and reporting requirements, while retaining the level of scrutiny demanded by Welsh Government. Global Wales III should consider whether steps can be taken to create more efficient processes that could help to alleviate the pressures placed on them.

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