



# Learned Society of Wales Response to Medr Strategic Plan Consultation, September 2024

## Introduction to the Learned Society of Wales

The Learned Society of Wales is Wales' National Academy for Sciences, Arts and Humanities. Our charitable purpose, and the principle on which we are founded, is the advancement of knowledge, and the power of research and innovation to benefit Wales' economy and society. National Academies are an independent and apolitical route for experts to support evidence-based policymaking, on key issues such as climate change, health, and the economy. We represent Wales in the international science and research community, positioning Wales as a knowledge economy that values evidence-based decision-making. We support the science, arts and humanities communities in Wales through advocacy, grants, and connectivity.

Why do we support knowledge and research in Wales? Research is crucial for progress: scientific, societal and economic. To tackle the challenges facing Wales today – the climate emergency, inequalities, economic growth – we need research and innovation to find and test new solutions.

## Overview of LSW's response to the consultation

Medr's open approach to drafting its Strategic Plan is commendable, and we greatly appreciate the opportunity to comment, alongside the wide breadth of the tertiary education system. This open approach is a positive indicator of Medr's collaborative approach going forward. The Plan itself also emphasises this spirit of collaboration, which we believe to be crucial for the future of our tertiary sector. As Wales' National Academy we look forward to playing our role in supporting the delivery of this Strategic Plan, working together not only with Medr through our ongoing partnership, but also with organisations across the wider tertiary sector.

Our comments on the consultation are informed by this position. We are encouraged by and supportive of the strategic direction outlined in the document, and have noted additional opportunities to highlight collaboration and complementarity – not only between research and learning but also across wider Welsh Government priorities – as well as some evidence-based suggestions to help inform the next stage of delivery. The comments provided in the following consultation form are intended to ensure Medr is considering the full breadth and depth of the benefits to Wales' economy and society that the advancement of knowledge, the power of research and innovation, and the people central to delivering this can bring.

## Consultation Questions

### Part One: legislative duties and evidence

1. The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 places eleven strategic duties on Medr to:
  1. Promote lifelong learning
  2. Promote equality of opportunity
  3. Encourage participation in tertiary education
  4. Promote continuous improvement in tertiary education
  5. Promote of research and innovation
  6. Promote collaboration and coherence in tertiary education and research
  7. Contribute to a sustainable and innovative economy
  8. Promote tertiary education through the medium of Welsh
  9. Promote a civic mission
  10. Promote a global outlook
  11. Promote collaboration between providers of tertiary education and trade unions

To what extent do you agree that the Plan enables us to fulfil our duties?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Are there any duties that are under-represented in the Plan?

- Yes
- No

#### Please provide details.

The eleven strategic duties are wide-ranging and comprehensive. LSW particularly welcomes the commitments to the promotion of research and innovation, and contributing to a sustainable and innovative economy.

There is an opportunity in this plan to outline how Medr's duties in research and innovation are key to achieving other Welsh Government commitments, for example to economic growth, the Welsh Language and the Climate Emergency.

2. Our Plan needs to respond to the [statement of strategic priorities for tertiary education and research and innovation](#) issued to us by the Welsh Government. The five priorities are:

1. Develop a tertiary system that prepares learners for a dynamic and changing economy where all can acquire the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in life and work.
2. Maintain and enhance the quality of the tertiary system, continue and intensify work on widening participation and take steps to ensure a more equitable and excellent system for all.
3. Putting the learner at the heart of the system by focusing on the experience of learners in the tertiary system and their wellbeing.
4. Ensure that the tertiary education system contributes to the economy and society.
5. Establish the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research as a highly effective organisation providing stability and leadership during this time of transition.

Does the Plan sufficiently address all of these priorities?

- Yes  
 No  
 Partially

**If no or partially, please provide details of how could it better respond to them.**

In addition to education, research and innovation are core to a strong economy and society.

3. i) Does the Plan take account of the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the [Equality Act 2010](#)

- Yes  
 No  
 Partially

**Please provide details.**

ii) Does the Plan take account of the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic<sup>1</sup> and persons who do not share it

- Yes  
 No  
 Partially

**Please provide details.**

The emphasis on EDI in the plan is very welcome: bold and unprecedented action is needed to effect change in this area.

iii) Does the Plan take account of the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it:

- Yes  
 No  
 Partially

**Please provide details.**

iv) Does the Plan take account of the need to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage<sup>2</sup>?

- Yes  
 No  
 Partially

**Please provide details.**

4. Will the Plan contribute to the achievement of the national [well-being goals](#) set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015?

- Yes  
 No

<sup>1</sup>Protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

<sup>2</sup> Socio-economic disadvantage is defined as: 'living in less favourable social and economic circumstances than others in the same society'. Experiencing socio-economic disadvantage may include some or all of the following:

- living in a deprived area;
- having little or no savings;
- having little or no income; and/or
- experiencing material deprivation (that is, lacking the things which most people would say are needed for an acceptable standard of living – such as the ability to replace worn-out furniture or to afford adequate heating).

Partially

**Please provide details.**

The plan rightly centres the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act for the future of skills and learners for Wales. There is a welcome and much-needed emphasis on wellbeing for learners in the Plan, and the aim to use data and evidence to make long-term decisions (p7) is important.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act places particular importance on Climate Action, which requires significant investment in and attention to monitoring, solutions and adaptations from science, technology, research and innovation.

The plan could also contribute to the Well-being of Future Generations Act with an outline of how this strategy will affect long-term impacts (beyond the strategy period) for future generations of researchers, as well as for research itself, which can take years to reach its full impact.

5. Are the aims and commitments in the Plan in accordance with the [sustainable development principle](#)?

Yes

No

Partially

**Please provide details.**

It is encouraging to see that the Plan acknowledges that change is required in the skills system for Wales to achieve a just transition to net zero.

The consideration of sustainable development in the section titled "Journey to Net Zero" on pages 13-14 is welcomed. This section could be bolstered with reference to the essential role that research and innovation has for achieving Net Zero.

6. In drafting this Plan, we have taken into account a wide range of evidence from published reports and statistics, including the Welsh Government's 'Our National Mission - high standards and aspirations for all', 'Cymraeg 2050 - a million Welsh speakers' and the Wellbeing of

Future Generations Commissioner's strategy for 2023-2050: 'Cymru Can'.

Is there any additional evidence we need to reflect in the Plan?

Yes

No

**Please provide details.**

Published after the draft plan (14 October 2024), the Universities Wales - London Economics report on the economic impact of Welsh Universities: [Welsh universities boost growth and productivity across the UK | Universities Wales \(uniswales.ac.uk\)](#).

The Learned Society of Wales analysis of impacts from Welsh research: [The Impacts of Research from Welsh Universities - The Learned Society of Wales](#).

7. Do you foresee any unintended consequences or negative impacts resulting from the Plan?

Yes

No

**Please provide details.**

## Part Two: Aims, Priorities and Opportunities

8. Medr's vision states that we will work in close collaboration with our partners to enable a tertiary education and research system which is centred around the needs of learners, society and the economy with excellence, equality and engagement at its heart.

Do the strategic aims in the Plan enable us to deliver on our vision?

Yes

No

Partially

**If no or partially, please provide details of how the Plan could better enable us to deliver on our vision. In your response, please consider the role your organisation would play in the realisation of our aims.**

The Learned Society of Wales plays an important role in supporting Medr's ambition for a tertiary system which centres around the needs of society and the economy. National Academies are a route for experts to support evidence-based policymaking, on key issues such as climate change, health, and the economy.

The Learned Society of Wales also plays an important role in supporting excellence and equity in the tertiary system. Fellows of the Learned Society are Wales's foremost experts across all areas of knowledge. Through LSW, their excellence becomes a resource and asset for Wales.

9. Within each of the strategic aims in the Plan, there are founding commitments to be achieved within the first two years, and growth commitments to be developed over five years.

Considering each of the strategic aims, are the founding and growth commitments correct?

- Yes  
 No  
 Partially

**Please provide details.**

Strategic Aims 1-3:

Strategic Aim 4 astutely references "our opportunity as a single tertiary entity to complement the focus of research and innovation with the development of education and training provision". This complementarity could be mirrored in Strategic Aims 1-3, with reference to the ways in which research informs learning. Higher education is by definition research-led, and indeed all evidence-based education is informed by knowledge generated through research. Therefore, several of the commitments made across these three sections rely on a healthy research ecosystem.

Strategic Aim 4:

The plan rightly outlines a strong commitment to research culture and EDI. This challenge will necessitate a bold and unprecedented approach in order

to be successful. Similarly, the ambition to review how we share our knowledge and learning within communities is a positive step.

We welcome the commitment to supporting providers to gain competitive advantage: this is an ambitious aim and will be challenging in an time of scarcity. In order to gain competitive advantage and achieve international acclaim, a commitment to international collaboration is required. Wales is a small country and as such will need to maintain and develop strong international relationships in order to access large grants such as Horizon Europe. Workforce mobility is crucial for a healthy and competitive research sector. This includes mobility between sectors – academia, industry, the public and third sectors – as well as inward mobility of talent to Wales.

The commitment to encouraging research and innovation with potential for positive impact on the economic, social and cultural life of Wales is welcome. Research and innovation underpin ambitions for improvement in any area of Welsh life. This section appropriately acknowledges of the value of research that benefits Wales, as well as research that has international reach. The title of the Strategic Aim, which emphasises only “internationally acclaimed” research, could perhaps reflect this. Arts and Humanities research underpins a significant portion of the sector’s impact within Wales, including our Creative Industries, a thriving Welsh Language, and our cultural life. Overcoming the particular and acute risks to these disciplines will require a distinct strategic approach.

As the body responsible for Welsh research, Medr has a core role in delivering Welsh Government’s wider ambitions. Investment in health and medical research leads to NHS efficiencies and saving lives; climate research is central to a sustainable Wales; arts and humanities research is key to the cultural wellbeing for the people of Wales and to the survival and growth of the Welsh language. Acknowledgement of this significant cross-cutting responsibility would further strengthen Strategic Aim 4.

Strategic Aim 5:

Medr’s commitment to the Welsh language is important, and this is an appropriate fifth strategic aim. Research has played a key role in the survival, promotion and growth of the Welsh language throughout its history. This section could mention how Medr’s commitment to research will further support this strategic aim, and the government’s ambitions for the Welsh Language.



10. What are the key priorities for current and future **learners** in the tertiary education and research sector in Wales?

Are these sufficiently reflected in the Plan?

- Yes
- No
- Partially

**Please provide details.**

In your response, please consider whether the Plan sufficiently balances these priorities alongside the other duties (as outlined in part one) placed on us.

11. What are the key priorities for tertiary education **providers** in Wales in the next five years?

Are these sufficiently reflected in the Plan?

- Yes
- No
- Partially

**Please provide details.**

In your response, please consider whether the Plan sufficiently balances these priorities alongside the other duties (as outlined in part one) placed on us.

12. What are the biggest opportunities of having a single body responsible for oversight of the whole tertiary sector?

**In your response, please consider whether the Plan enables us to make the most of these opportunities, or how we could do this better.**

A single body responsible for oversight of the whole tertiary sector will support increased join-up between the tertiary education and research sectors, which has potential benefits for civic mission, as well as improvements for access to the research sector.

13. Medr has a duty to promote collaboration throughout the tertiary education and research sector.

To what extent does the Plan enable us to make the most of opportunities to collaborate?

- Fully
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all

**Please provide details.**

We warmly welcome an environment of increased collaboration and reduced competition. This is hugely beneficial for the research sector as well as for learning. There is an opportunity to highlight these benefits for research on page 11.

As Wales's National Academy and an independent body, the Learned Society of Wales is well-placed to support these ambitions for greater collaboration in research and innovation.

A collaborative approach could see Medr investing strategically in national capabilities and infrastructures which would create cost savings and efficiencies both for Medr and for the sector, compared to smaller grants duplicated across institutions. This approach would also increase Wales's competitiveness for significant UK and international funding.

14. We need to be ambitious about what we can achieve. However, the financial environment we are working in is challenging. We also recognise the establishment of Medr is a significant change for the sector and we are committed to ensuring a smooth transition.

Considering the context we are working in, to what extent is the level of ambition in the Plan suitable?

- Fully
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all

**Please provide details.**

The plan is ambitious, and rightly so. Underinvestment in research is a false economy, resulting in missed opportunities for cost saving and increased

efficiencies across the public sector (especially the NHS), as well as opportunities for much-needed economic growth through innovation.

Wales currently receives proportionally less unhypothecated funding than English universities for research. In order to see success in competitive international funding, the baseline investment needs to be sufficient to keep pace.

Research from the London School of Economics shows that every £1 invested in Welsh Universities returns £13 for the public. Once we understand research and innovation to be a necessary investment for economic growth, rather than a cost, then it becomes clear that the current financial environment is exactly the right time for an ambitious approach.

### Part Three: Our Ambitions

15. Please consider the ambitions on page 4 of the Plan.

a) To what extent do you agree with our long-term ambitions for success?

- Fully
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all

#### **Please provide details.**

“Growth in the excellence and impact of research and innovation in Wales” is a welcome ambition and we look forward to supporting this work. The recent [Learned Society of Wales Report on Wales’s REF 2021 Impact Case Studies](#) shows that Wales overperforms despite comparatively low investment. With 70% of this research creating benefits for Wales, further reductions in real-term funding would put this national strength, and the benefits it brings for the communities of Wales, at risk.

“Greater alignment of knowledge, skills and understanding with the economic, community, cultural and environment needs of Wales” is a welcome ambition. We recommend that research is recognised as being at the heart of this. However, there needs to be a recognition alongside this that fundamental and blue-sky research is the foundation upon which the

research that directly creates benefits for Wales – as well as the education of our learners – is built.

“Reduced inequalities and removal of barriers to learning” and “Increased participation in tertiary education” are also of vital importance. These ambitions are core to research and innovation, as well as learning and education.

b) What changes are required in the sector to achieve these long-term ambitions?

**Please provide details and examples.**

The primary change required for the sector to achieve these long-term ambitions is funding that parallels the English university system. The implications are not only for competitiveness, but also for Wales to see the benefits of research for efficiency, the economy, health, sustainability, and more. As stated above, underinvestment in research is a false economy, increasing avoidable costs elsewhere in the public sector.

Further to this core issue, there are a number of no-cost changes that would bring benefits for the sector:

Putting in place bold and progressive measures that incentivise the removal of barriers to access to research careers will greatly improve the diversity of the research sector, which in turn will support improvements in excellence, impact, and efficiency ([‘Science Benefits from Diversity’](#), Nature June 2018).

The plan’s ambitions to align with the economic, community, cultural and environment needs of Wales would benefit from a Research Excellence Framework that recognises the value of research that benefits ‘only’ Wales as much as research with international reach.

“Greater alignment of knowledge, skills and understanding with the economic, community, cultural and environment needs of Wales” will require join-up between Medr in its role as body responsible for research, and other parts of Welsh Government. Research, science and innovation is core to achieving key targets across departments, including the NHS, culture, and climate change.

A joined-up approach to continuity of funding between Medr and other departments of Welsh Government would also have huge benefits for the sector. Medium-scale discontinued projects do not offer sufficient time and

space to realise full potential in research and innovation. A combination of innovation that can “fail fast” alongside longer, sustained, and evolving centres of excellence allows for innovation to flourish, generating profit, cost savings, and long-term societal benefits for Wales, as well as international esteem.

c) How will we be able to measure success against these ambitions?

**Please provide details and examples.**

The strategy would benefit from the inclusion of specific and measurable targets against which to measure success.

Impact and excellence in research itself benefits from a mature existing measurement mechanism, the Research Excellence Framework.

#### **Part Four: Welsh Language**

16. Does the Plan appropriately reflect the Welsh Government’s ambition to increase the number of Welsh speakers and increase the use of the Welsh language?

- Yes
- No
- Partially

**Please provide details.**

17. What positive or adverse effects might the Plan have on:  
a) opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language  
b) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

18. Could the Plan be changed to increase positive effects, or decrease adverse effects on:  
a) opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?

Yes

No

**Please provide details.**

b) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

Yes

No

**Please provide details.**

