

# Cylchlythyr | Circular

## Consultation on the Wales Research Environment and Culture (WREC) fund

**Date:** 21 December 2023  
**Reference:** W23/33HE  
**To:** Heads of higher education institutions in Wales  
**Response by:** Consultation on the funding methodology: **19 January 2024**  
Expressions of Interest for hosting the two Networks: **29 January 2024**

**Contact:** Name: Hayley Moulding or Hywel Edwards  
Email: [hayley.a.moulding@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:hayley.a.moulding@hefcw.ac.uk),  
[hywel.edwards@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:hywel.edwards@hefcw.ac.uk)

This circular outlines details of a new Wales Research Environment and Culture fund and invites responses regarding the proposed allocation methodology. £200,000 will be allocated in AY 2023/24 to support new and existing activities within eligible institutions that enhance positive research cultures and environments.

This circular also invites applications from eligible organisations, or consortia of organisations, to support the development and management of two research culture Networks, supported by £50,000 in AY 2023/24.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).



Noddir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
Sponsored by  
**Welsh Government**

## Background

1. The development and sustainability of healthy and excellent research cultures and environments in higher education institutions (HEIs) and organisations across the UK's research sector is pivotal to supporting excellent, high-quality research.
2. Institutions in England that qualify for quality-related (QR) funding have received funding to support research culture and environment projects since January 2022. This is part of the Enhancing Research Culture initiative. This funding was top-sliced from Research England's overall QR funding allocation.
3. HEFCW recognises that Welsh HEIs are already supporting positive research cultures and environments via their QR allocations. There is a clear need for enhancement of activity in this area and following discussions with the sector, HEFCW has decided to launch the Wales Research Environment and Culture (WREC) fund.
4. WREC funding will be allocated to Welsh HEIs in receipt of QR funding. This funding will provide dedicated support for building and developing healthy research cultures and environments. This will include building new capacity and enhancing existing projects related to research cultures and environment.
5. WREC funding will be allocated for AY 2023/24 on behalf of HEFCW, with the expectation that the funding will continue until AY 2027/28 subject to budgets and decisions of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.
6. This circular has three purposes:
  - i. Provide information regarding the new WREC fund;
  - ii. Consultation on the methodology used in the allocation of £200,000 to Welsh HEIs;
  - iii. Call for Expressions of Interest to host, manage and strategically deliver two pan-Wales Networks with funding of £50,000. This is to support sharing of practice, collaboration and co-development of activities across Wales relating to healthy and positive research cultures and research environments.

## Institutional WREC Funding

7. The allocation of £200,000 funding to Welsh HEIs is to support projects, programmes and activities that actively contribute to the development of positive and healthy research cultures and environments. In this context, "Welsh HEIs" refers to all institutions in Wales in receipt of QR funding (as set out in [W23/19HE: HEFCW's Funding Allocations for Academic Year 2023/24](#) published 19 July 2023).
8. HEFCW recognises the importance of collaboration across the sector in developing positive research cultures and the role of organisations such as the Wales Innovation Network, the Learned Society of Wales, and Universities Wales.

Eligible HEIs are strongly encouraged to work collaboratively and build on existing activities that support positive research cultures and environments among HEIs and research-related organisations.

9. In determining the use of allocations, institutions should refer to the three themes outlined in the table below. These have been identified by HEFCW following engagement with the Welsh and UK research sectors. The table does not present an exhaustive list and institutions are encouraged to use the funding flexibly accounting for their strategic priorities, and broader principles relating to improving research cultures and environments. For example, HEIs may decide to use this funding to support additional activity relating to concordats, agreements and reviews. If so, HEIs are expected to demonstrate an enhanced impact to their community beyond adherence to principles.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Potential sub areas of alignment</b>
<b>Creating Positive Research Culture(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reward and recognition of positive behaviours</li> <li>• Identifying what a positive research culture looks like including well-being</li> <li>• Valuing diverse research activity</li> <li>• Career development of researchers and associated professions</li> <li>• Developing research culture frameworks</li> <li>• Improving infrastructure and capacity to support better research grant capture</li> <li>• Tackling bullying and harassment</li> </ul>
<b>Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding and addressing barriers to inclusion for applicants from under-represented groups in research talent pipeline</li> <li>• Recognition of all-staff contributions</li> </ul>
<b>Responsible Research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrity, openness and ethics</li> <li>• Improving research conduct and reproducibility</li> <li>• Research assessment and reform</li> <li>• Collaboration and convening institutions to share practice</li> <li>• Reproducibility of metrics</li> </ul>

10. HEFCW encourages HEIs to support activities and/or projects that positively impact the use of the Welsh language.
11. HEFCW expects the funding to demonstrate progress and enhancement of activity related to research culture. HEFCW recognises that this funding could be used to enhance existing projects, and also for new activities or infrastructure.
12. Funding may be backdated to 1 August 2023 where added value to the HEI can be evidenced.
13. Institutions should consider the requirements of the future Research Excellence Framework in developing their activities, in particular where their activities can contribute to the People, Culture and Environment element.

14. HEFCW expects that WREC funding to be used to develop a supportive and inclusive research environment, which values the contribution of academic staff, research enabling and support staff, and professional services staff. This includes, but is not limited to, technicians, archivists, software engineers.
15. HEFCW recognises that the Wellbeing and Health Strategies and the Strategic Equality Plans at HEIs are currently under review. Institutions could consider how to engage with researchers and research-enabling staff as part of the reviews, embedding developments in research culture activity across the institution.

## WREC Allocation Methodology

16. The methodology used to allocate funding for 2023/2024 is based on 2021/2022 HESA staff and student data:
  - Number of FTEs on research-only contracts at the higher education institution
  - Number of FTEs on teaching and research contracts at the higher education institution
  - Number of postgraduate research students at the higher education institution
17. All eligible HEIs will receive allocations in AY 2023/24. A minimum allocation of £5k has been included to ensure that all eligible HEIs have a usable allocation to enhance their research cultures and environments.<sup>1</sup>

Institution	FTEs				£
	Research contracts	Teaching and Research contracts	PGR students	Total	Feb-24 allocation
University of South Wales	67	664	220	951	<b>19,038</b>
Aberystwyth University	125	275	242	641	<b>12,841</b>
Bangor University	203	244	430	877	<b>17,562</b>
Cardiff University	937	1,273	1,761	3,971	<b>79,501</b>
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	32	297	606	935	<b>18,719</b>
Swansea University	449	521	729	1,699	<b>34,015</b>
Cardiff Metropolitan University	17	496	152	666	<b>13,324</b>
Wrexham University	2	176	41	219	<b>5,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	1,832	3,946	4,180	9,958	<b>200,000</b>

18. HEFCW notes that WREC funding allocation methodology does not explicitly include research-supporting staff such as some of the technical community, and professional services staff. HEFCW recognises the crucial contributions of these staff members to overall research cultures and the research environment.

<sup>1</sup> Source: HESA staff record & student record 2021/22: HESA staff contract session population, HESA student session population and Numbers are FTEs.

19. The above funding methodology is proposed for the AY 2023/24 allocation. The funding methodology may be reviewed in future years in light of the Networks' development, institutional activity and the research landscape to ensure that support can respond to future priorities.
20. HEFCW invites institutions to submit their comments on the proposed funding methodology for AY 2023/2024 to [research.wales@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:research.wales@hefcw.ac.uk) using the consultation form attached as **Annex A** by **Friday 19 January 2024**.

### **WREC Fund Monitoring arrangements**

21. Institutional allocations for AY 2023/24 will be made in February 2024. As a result, HEFCW recognises that monitoring requirements for AY 2023/24 should be minimal. HEFCW expects some assurances concerning the projects and activities that are being undertaken because of this allocation. WREC funding monitoring will be undertaken through completing the form at **Annex B**:
  - Part 1 should indicate how the activities/projects align with the thematic areas outlined in the *Institutional WREC Funding* section of this circular.
  - Part 2 of the form should include a list of activities impacted by the funding and provide evidence of how the allocation has supported the activities in AY 2023/24 by reporting on whether:
    - activities would have taken place without the funding,
    - activities only took place as a result of the funding, and otherwise would not have taken place,
    - activities would have taken place, but to a lesser extent, without the funding.
22. The expectation is that monitoring returns **do not exceed three A4 pages**.
23. Information submitted by institutions in their reports will form the basis of evidence to support future budget decisions and support for research culture and research environment across Wales.

### **Research Environment and Culture Networks**

24. HEFCW will provide funding to create two collaborative Networks to enable research professionals in leadership and operational positions to work collaboratively and collectively at a strategic level. These Networks will catalyse ideas through discussion and sharing promising practice, knowledge, challenges, barriers and opportunities.
25. HEFCW will award £50k through an Expression of Interest (Eoi) process to support the development, management and strategic delivery of two pan-Wales networks. These networks will bring together institutions, organisations, relevant bodies with a collective and collaborative aim of building better, healthier, and more positive research culture across Wales.

26. The Eol process will be used to award funding to a lead institution or organisation to host, manage and lead the Networks. The expression of interest process and criteria can be found in **Annex C** of this circular.
27. Funding for the two Networks will be allocated to a single bid, with the successful lead organisation responsible for developing and managing **both** Networks on behalf of the Welsh research sector. The lead organisation does **not** need to be a higher education institution but **must be** eligible for grant funding from HEFCW.
28. Eols are invited from groups or consortia of organisations, with a lead organisation that is eligible for direct grant payment from HEFCW. Whilst individual institutions/organisations can apply, the successful proposal will need to demonstrate support of the broader research community as part of their application.
29. Expressions of Interest for hosting the two Networks should be submitted to [research.wales@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:research.wales@hefcw.ac.uk) using the form attached as **Annex C** by **Monday 29 January 2024**.

## Timetable

30. Below is a timetable outlining our expectations during the consultation and planning period.

<b>November 2023</b>	HEFCW Council approval of funding	
<b>December 2023</b>	Publication of consultation and call for Expressions of Interest	
<b>January 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation forms submitted</li> <li>• Analysis of consultation responses by HEFCW</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressions of Interest forms submitted</li> </ul>
<b>February 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation of WREC funding methodology</li> <li>• Allocations of WREC funding to Welsh higher education institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of Expressions of Interest applicants</li> <li>• Confirmation of successful organisation(s) to support the Networks</li> </ul>
<b>March 2024</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement with organisation(s) and HEFCW regarding grant payment to fund Networks</li> <li>• Grant payment to organisation(s)</li> </ul>
<b>April 2024</b>	Transition to Commission for Tertiary Education and Research	
<b>July 2024</b>	Monitoring form to be completed and submitted in July 2024.	

## **Further information / responses to**

31. For further information, contact [research.wales@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:research.wales@hefcw.ac.uk).

## **Assessing the impact of our policies**

32. Applications can be submitted in Welsh, and will be treated no less favourably than applications submitted in English.
33. We have carried out an impact assessment screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We also considered the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales and potential impacts towards the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including our Well-Being Objectives. Contact [equality@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:equality@hefcw.ac.uk) for more information about impact assessments.