



29th September 2016

Paper Title:	NRW Strategic Academic Sector Engagement Plan
Paper Reference:	Paper NRW B B 60.16
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Purpose of Paper:	Development / Information
Recommendation:	That you note early progress and provide advice and direction on further key developments.

Impact: To note – all headings might not be applicable to the topic	<p>How do the proposals in this paper help NRW achieve the Well-Being of Future Generations Act principles in terms of:</p> <p>Looking at the <u>long term</u>: NRW’s academic/external engagement plan for evidence focuses initially on developing long-term strategic relationships with all nine Welsh universities, and subsequently with other evidence providers. These relationships will drive the development and delivery of a shared agenda for the benefit of Wales.</p> <p>Taking an <u>integrated</u> approach: The life-cycle of research-based evidence leading to effective policy-making is complex and can be long. A strong and co-ordinated plan for academic engagement will increase NRW’s agenda-setting ability as well as developing forums for intersectoral future planning. Engaging with the academic sector gives NRW access to evidence, analysis, and skills not available in-house or elsewhere in the public sector.</p>
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	<p>Involving a <u>diversity</u> of the population: Higher Education Funding Council for Wales figures for 2012/13 state that 8% of students at Welsh HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) were from ethnic minority backgrounds, compared to 4% of the Welsh population as a whole. The strategy is intended to foster engagement with all levels of the HEI hierarchies, from undergraduates to senior management. Engagement with the HEI sector exposes a diverse sub-section of the population to NRW’s work.</p> <p>Working in a <u>collaborative</u> way: NRW and the academic sector can provide a high level of expertise and mutual support. The plan of ongoing linkages is collaborative by nature, with mutually beneficial outcomes.</p> <p><u>Preventing</u> issues from occurring: Close liaison with the research-based communities gives NRW access to, and relationships with, experts in their fields who can support operational intervention improvements as well as horizon-scanning future issues, e.g., our partnership with Bangor University’s School of Ocean Sciences to develop an early warning system for the presence of marine non-native species and a cross-Wales HEI futures workshop with corporate planning.</p>
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Issue

1. NRW’s relationships with the academic sector are increasingly valuable given resource constraints in the public sector. The HEI sector itself is just beginning to realise the budgetary constraints ahead. The two camps share a substantial area of common ground and can work together in a complementary fashion, particularly with regards to evidence collection. By pooling expertise and resources, the universities and NRW can meet their respective objectives while contributing to joined-up policy development and operational interventions. Given this increasing value, a strategic approach has been developed to strengthen and formalise the links between NRW and universities, starting with those located in Wales. Significant progress has been made in several areas of NRW’s agenda of engagement with this sector.



This paper details these and seeks suggestions for improvement and innovation.

Background

2. Since the introduction of the Research Excellence Framework in 2014, universities have been eager to work with government agencies, because funding has become dependent on both academic and user impact. Universities and NRW both stand to gain by developing a more strategic approach to co-operation in information terms (e.g., research/evidence expertise and data, joint working on policy development and multi-directional learning and development opportunities for staff) and in physical resources (co-location and access to equipment).
3. A précis of key progress follows.
4. MoU with Universities Wales – Emyr Roberts and Prof Colin Riordan (Vice-Chancellor of Cardiff University and Chair of Universities Wales) signed a high-level strategic MoU on 19 April 2016, committing to organisational co-operation and collaboration. It covers four key areas:
 - a. evidence provisioning;
 - b. learning and development;
 - c. asset and facility sharing;
 - d. business and innovation.Emyr Roberts will meet with the Cross-Wales Vice-Chancellors Group annually.
5. Cross-NRW External Evidence Group – this acts as a co-ordination focus for the programme of work and other NRW university-related activities, with Michael Evans as programme executive, Kathryn Monk as project manager, and supporters or leads for each element of the MoU.
6. University visits – formal visits by Emyr Roberts and staff to Aberystwyth, Bangor, Swansea, Trinity St David's and Glyndŵr have taken place over the past 18 months to raise understanding of NRW's business and stimulate collaboration. A visit to Cardiff Met is confirmed for 3 November 2016 and University of South Wales is still to be confirmed, as is a proposed public lecture at Cardiff University. (Open University Wales is the 9th university.)



7. Cross-Wales workshops – two pilot workshops on cross-cultural challenges and collaborative working were held in Cardiff (2015) and Aberystwyth (June 2016). A third will be held in Bangor in October 2016. Several policy-focussed workshops have also been held, and more topic-focussed workshops to start work in new areas are being identified.
8. Higher Education Institution/NRW evidence platform – following considerable discussion, this is now owned by all nine universities in Wales, and is progressing well. A funding proposal to formalise its leadership has been discussed with Universities Wales since March. Latest budgetary changes have caused further discussion. It is intended that this platform will become a major conduit for engagement, information flow and strategic requests between NRW and other evidence users and the academic providers. The platform is also the lead contact for Asset and Facility Sharing. Kathryn Monk is co-opted onto the cross-Wales Pro-Vice-Chancellors Research Group, which instigated the evidence platform work.
9. Learning and Development – NRW met productively with the cross-Wales Pro-Vice-Chancellors' Teaching and Learning Group. The Developing our People and Teams Programme Board supported the approach and recognised the potential in May 2016. Progress is hampered by lack of staff resources.
10. Facilities and Assets – NRW's Head of Corporate Assets, David Letellier, presented to the HEI evidence platform in May 2016 and has started visiting different campuses to recognise future opportunities. NRW is now a member of the Wales Higher Education Library Forum (WHELF), through which we can develop agreements around NRW staff access to university libraries and online resources across Wales.
11. Business and Innovation – this has not yet been developed with the universities. A first step has been made internally, with the creation of a pilot cross-NRW Innovation Group. The group recognises that both behavioural and technological innovation are necessary and will explore how it can be effective in increasing opportunities for innovation between both for NRW and the HEIs. NRW is also engaged alongside the universities in the development of the Wales National Innovation Body.

Assessment



12. Recording of cross-NRW external linkages – all levels of external evidence interactions are increasingly being registered centrally. Because this is a voluntary, manual process, it is likely that the number and type of interactions is under-reported.
13. Letters of support – between April 2014 and August 2016, NRW quality assured and registered 26 letters of support to institutions for external project funding proposals. Of these, 12 (46%) were successful, 11 were unsuccessful, and three are pending or with unknown outcomes. This compares favourably to, e.g., the overall rate of successful proposals for Natural Environment Research Council grants, which is roughly 25%.
14. Quantitative analysis of linkages – 103 members of NRW staff have had 365 different interactions with 133 external evidence-providing institutions. 43% of these interactions were with Welsh universities. In 28% of all interactions, NRW acted as an informal partner, in 22% as project managers, in 11% as formal partners, and in 5% in formal or supervisory roles in postgraduate studies. **Summary report in Annexe 2.**

Recommendation(s)

15. We seek the Board's advice on relative priorities for the overall engagement strategy, guidance on key areas where our relationships with the academic sector could be most effectively strengthened, and suggestions to take forward the Business and Innovation interactions.

Key Risks

16. Failure to engage strategically with the academic sector will preclude the realisation of the multiple potential benefits described above, preventing collaboration and reducing the effectiveness of programmes within both sectors.

Financial Implications

17. Collaborative working with the higher education sector has minimal direct on-cost, and has the potential to spread the capital costs of projects across a wider base, to produce efficiency savings for the public sector as a whole by reduction of duplication of effort, and to facilitate NRW's ongoing commitment to innovation in sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR).



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Board Paper

Equality impact assessment (EqIA)

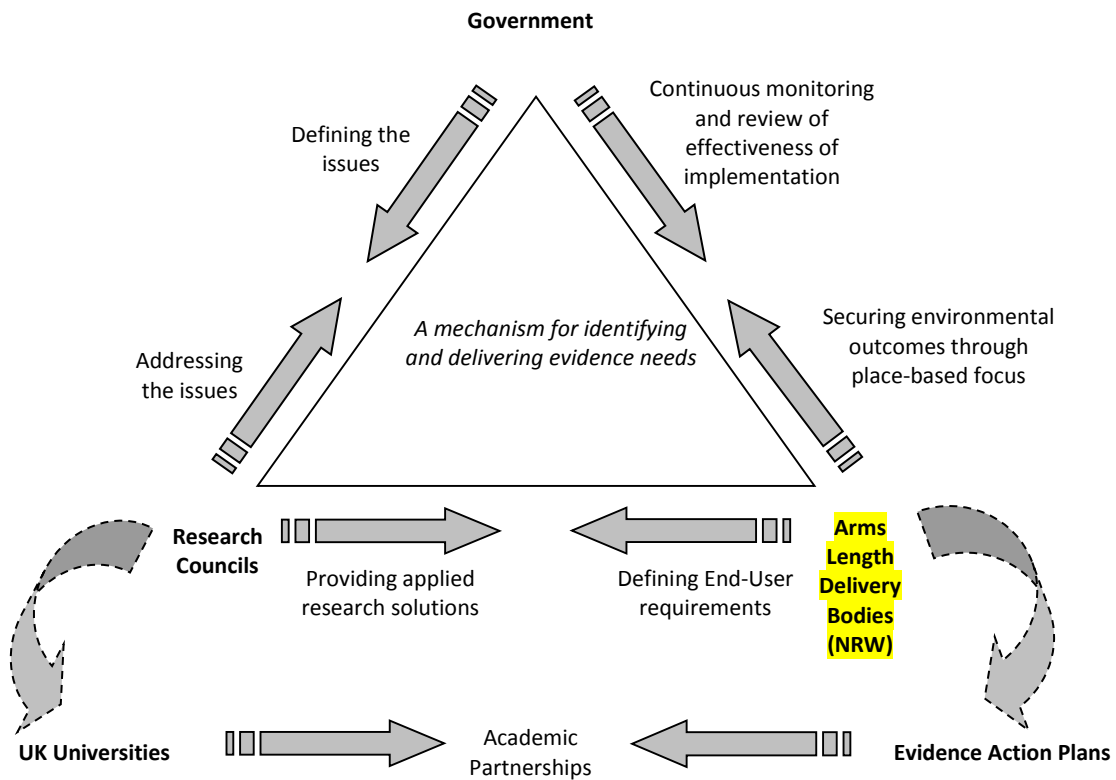
18. No EqIA was required.

Index of Annexes

1. Structure of Evidence Network
2. Data on HEI and other evidence linkages.



Annexe 1 – Structure of Evidence Network



Annexe 2 – details of recorded external evidence linkages

Letters of Support: List of successful projects:

Lead Partner Institution	Institution category	Project Proposal (title)
ADAS UK	Consultancy	SSGP application for a feasibility project looking at Natural Resource Management: pesticide prediction calendar, using Earth Observation data.
Bangor University	Welsh university	RESILCOAST - integrating ecosystem resilience into coastal planning for the persistence of natural flood protection and wetland ecosystem services
Bangor University	Welsh university	Understanding the relevance of eDNA in freshwater lotic ecosystems.
BSSS (Cranfield university)	UK university	World Congress of Soil Science 2022 bid
Cardiff University	Welsh university	Flood Hazard Indices and Flood Inundation Extent for Extreme Flood Events
HR Wallingford	Consultancy	NERC Green Infrastructure Innovation Projects Call - Implementing GI approaches to river engineering protection measures
Liverpool University	UK university	Facilitating the application of decision support tools for habitat creation in multi-functional landscapes.
Open University	UK university	Valuing Green Infrastructure Through Tree Assessment Tools (VITAL)
Plymouth Marine Laboratory	Research institution	CoastWEB: Valuing the contribution which Coastal habitats make to human health and wellbeing, with a focus on the alleviation of coastal natural hazards and extreme events
Swansea University	Welsh university	KESS PhD: Advanced Telemetry and Bio-logging for Investigating Grey Seal Interactions with Marine Renewable Energy Installations
University of Glasgow	UK university	Green Grey Infrastructure: assessing the critical success factors for bioengineering of hard assets
University of Exeter	UK University	Trophic Cascade and Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals in two Contrasting River Catchments



Institutional contacts as registered

NRW has 103 members of staff registering contacts with institutions. These are split between departments as follows:

KSP	National Services	Operations North & Mid	Operations South
91%	3%	1%	5%

NRW engages with 133 different institutions, which are broken down between categories as follows:

Institution category	Percentage
Association of academic institutions	5%
Consultancy	1%
European university	4%
International university	1%
NGO	3%
Public body	15%
Research institute	5%
UK university	22%
Welsh university	43%
Unknown	1%

Type of interaction

Nature of NRW's role	Number of instances	Percentage
Academic Project Supervision	12	4%
Customer	4	1%
Expert advice	3	1%
Formal Partner	34	10%
Frequent contact and previous partnership working	6	2%
Honorary Lectureship / Professorship	4	1%
Informal Partner	91	28%
Lead contractor	11	3%
Project management	70	22%
NRW/WBP Ecosystems Advisor leads project and staff provide input and assist in project development	15	5%
Provide support to the bid (awarded in 2015) and provide support for field trips planned for Wales during the congress in 2022	1	0.3%
Providing advice from a Welsh context	1	0.3%
Research Studentship Agreement	4	1%
Unknown	69	21%