

## **Engaging for Impact - WISERD'S Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2012 to 2015**

### **Introduction**

Knowledge exchange & transfer (KE & KT) is a key priority for WISERD. As a Wales-wide academic network, WISERD is well placed to connect external audiences to the latest social science knowledge and expertise. WISERD is in a strong position to facilitate the development and enhancement of relationships with external stakeholders and user communities by:

- Bringing academics together to conduct multi-disciplinary research to address increasingly complex evidential needs;
- Strengthening social science infrastructure and resources in Wales;
- Supporting researchers in developing active engagement with user communities
- Developing strategic alliances with research users

The Welsh context to WISERD's research programme is of particular importance. Wales is a small country with limited social science capacity. However, this small scale potentially makes it easier to collaborate across disciplines and sectors; and for universities to develop a genuine dialogue with research users.

### **Why is knowledge exchange important?**

In recent years, the government has placed increasing emphasis on the need for evidence of economic and social impact from its investment in research. To maximise the impact of research, researchers need to engage with key user groups. This can provide substantial benefits for the quality of research, including:

- Early feedback – to help shape your research agenda and improve methodologies
- Relevance – ensuring your research is meaningful, timely and useful
- Recruiting participants, for example for focus groups or surveys
- Developing new skills and raising your profile.

In addition, high quality social science research has the potential to enhance social and economic wellbeing across all sections of society. By ensuring that decisions on policy and practice are informed by secure evidence, research can help to:

- Improve the effectiveness and sustainability of public, private and third sector organisations
- Improve social welfare and cohesion
- Increase economic prosperity, wealth creation and regeneration
- Enhance cultural enrichment and quality of life.

Knowledge exchange is an increasingly important priority for UK Research Councils, who are seeking to maximise their investments in the social sciences. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) underlines the importance of universities engaging with research users; and of research having a demonstrable impact on social, economic and environmental outcomes.

There is also growing interest amongst user communities in tapping into the knowledge and expertise within universities. The Welsh Government, for example, is working closely with WISERD on a number of joint initiatives and is making

increasing use of placement fellows, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) and PhD internships to extend its analytical capabilities.

### **Why a Knowledge Exchange Strategy?**

Knowledge exchange is widely accepted as being a good thing, but it often means different things to different people. A KE strategy provides an opportunity for WISERD to clearly set out its approach and objectives so that stakeholders will know what they can expect and progress can be monitored and evaluated. Developing a strategy also provides an opportunity for WISERD to consult with staff, associates and stakeholders on knowledge exchange priorities.

Having a separate strategy does not imply that knowledge exchange is a stand-alone activity. Rather, WISERD's aim is for KE to run through all of its activities, from project inception to dissemination, and from the level of individual research projects to WISERD-wide programmes. Flexibility is also required at project level, as different approaches will be required depending on the audiences for, and purpose of, KE. This strategy provides a focus for WISERD's KE activities and a mechanism for framing, monitoring and evaluating delivery of KE. It is a companion document to WISERD's overarching strategy for 2012-15.

### **Scope of Strategy**

For the purpose of this strategy, WISERD's audiences are:-

- policy and practice communities in the public and third sectors;
- private sector organisations;
- the general public.

To date most of WISERD's KE activity has focussed on the public policy community, in particular the Welsh Government. Over the period 2012 to 2015 we intend to place our relations with the Welsh Government on a more strategic footing, extend engagement to other public sector and third sector organisations and explore how we can improve the dissemination of research to the general public and private sector organisations.

The strategy covers the period 2012 to 2015, with key actions for the coming academic year 2012/13.

### **Key objectives**

WISERD has seven priority KE objectives:-

1. Deliver a programme of research that delivers relevant and useful evidence in support of Welsh policy and practice;
2. Provide a sustainable infrastructure for research and knowledge exchange;
3. Support researchers to engage effectively in knowledge exchange;
4. Create opportunities for a genuine dialogue and shared understanding with research users;
5. Improve our communication of research/evidence;
6. Develop strategic alliances with key stakeholders;
7. Evaluate the effectiveness of WISERD's KE strategy and activities

Each objective is discussed in turn below.

*1. Deliver a programme of research that delivers useful evidence in support of Welsh policy and practice*

WISERD's research programme will embrace a 'mixed portfolio' of activities, ranging from basic science to applied research projects. It will continue to have a focus on the Welsh economy and society in a comparative context, across the UK and more widely. It will focus on a number of key themes that build on work carried out to date by WISERD researchers:

- The distributional consequences of economic recession;
- Devolved governance, state policy and civil society;
- Social mobility, spatial mobility and labour markets;
- Ethnic group and social class in social reproduction.

These themes map closely on to the key policy concerns that are likely to dominate the coming period in Wales (as set out in the Programme for Government 2011-2016) and more widely across the UK and internationally. These include:

- Improving regional and local economic development;
- Ameliorating poverty and social disadvantage;
- Improving educational attainment;
- Strengthening civic society and its capacities.

We will enhance the policy value of our research by:

- Bringing together academics from different disciplines and subject areas to work together on challenging, cross cutting policy questions – for example, understanding the levers for behavioural change; ameliorating poverty and social disadvantage; and strengthening civic society
- Developing a viable model of 'interactive social science' that involves potential research users from project inception to dissemination and application
- Combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a rich, explanatory evidence base
- Producing evidence review reports to support policy development.
- Developing a (virtual) policy evaluation centre of excellence to provide advice to policy makers/practitioners

## *2. Provide a sustainable infrastructure for research and knowledge exchange*

We will support the development of a social science infrastructure for Wales by:

- Maximising the use of Welsh data-sets: making the most of the considerable investments made by the WG and other public bodies in Wales and allowing WISERD to deliver data and/or research swiftly and cost effectively. We will do this by:-
  - undertaking research that maximises the use of existing data-sets, in particular longitudinal sources such as the Millennium Cohort Study and Understanding Society;
  - publicising this research to demonstrate the value of such data-sets;
  - further developing the WISERD GeoPortal which provides meta-data on a wide range of data sources relevant to Wales;
  - providing training to build quantitative capacity within Wales;
  - providing support to academic colleagues interested in developing research grant bids in or on Wales.

- Collaborating with partners, in particular the Health Information Research Unit (HIRU) at Swansea University and the Office for National Statistics, to combine data-sets and contribute to the development of a 'data integration hub' for Wales
- Exploring with potential partners and data users the feasibility of a Welsh Social Attitudes Survey
- Contributing to the development of a national data strategy for Wales
- Continuing to support pan-Wales research networks that bring together academics, policy makers and practitioners
- Increasing our share of external KE income to provide a sustainable funding base

### *3. Support researchers to engage effectively in knowledge exchange*

One-to-one relationships are the foundation of good KE and researchers are increasingly required to demonstrate how their projects will, and have, had impact. We will support researchers by:-

- Developing tailored guidance on measuring and maximising impact (including having impact beyond the life of the original project) by distilling and, where necessary, extending guidance already available from the ESRC and other sources
- Ensuring performance in relation to knowledge exchange is included in job descriptions and staff objectives and appraisal
- Disseminating examples of good knowledge exchange practice via presentations at conferences/seminars; inclusion of articles in WISERD News and on the WISERD website
- Providing one to one advice and guidance on knowledge exchange and impact matters

### *4. Create opportunities for a genuine dialogue and shared understanding with research users by:*

- Holding a series of evidence symposia across key themes of policy and academic interest. A successful application as submitted to the ESRC for KE funding to support four symposia (funded jointly with the WG). These symposia will take place during 2012-13
- Continuing to hold an annual WISERD conference that brings together academics and policy makers to discuss recent research and findings
- Holding regular meetings with key research users to discuss current and planned research and funding opportunities
- Encouraging people exchanges via placements, internships, job shadowing etc
- Providing public policy leaders with WISERD key contacts
- Contributing to the ESRC Festival of Social Science

### *5. Improve our communication of research/evidence by:*

- Combining various publishing outputs, including social media, for wider communication of research findings/evidence
- Continuing to publicise and disseminate WISERD research via WISERD news; press releases; research reports; and policy briefings

- Providing summaries of research findings in appropriate language/format suitable for different groups
- Developing a Policy Briefing Series that will draw out aspects of WISERD's research that relate directly to policy and/or practice
- Establishing an enhanced website presence for major research projects
- Sharing emerging project findings with key policy/practice audiences via informal presentations/meetings
- Maximising opportunities to speak at policy relevant events
- Developing seminar series to discuss research findings and/or evidence with key user groups, in particular, working with the Welsh Government

#### *6. Develop strategic agreements with key stakeholders*

KE activities to date have been mainly informal and responsive to opportunities such as ESRC KE funding calls. For the next phase, WISERD will develop a more forward thinking, strategic approach to knowledge exchange by developing strategic agreements with key partners. These agreements will focus on shared priorities and will outline the respective roles and commitments of partners.

An early objective is to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the WG, that will act as a model for the development of agreements with other partners and should enable us to lever in additional funding (e.g. from Research Councils). It is envisaged that the MOU will cover respective research priorities; details of a collaborative programme that could include joint research, seminars/events and shared training; flexible support arrangements including WISERD support to conduct evidence reviews, peer reviews of research specifications/reports and data analysis; people exchanges such as placements, internships, secondments; and respective commitments to the agreement, including funding.

The WISERD Advisory Group is due to be reviewed in 2012 providing an opportunity for WISERD to consider how to more effectively involve research users.

#### *7. Evaluate the effectiveness of WISERD's KE strategy and activities*

Evaluating the impact of research is notoriously difficult since the policy/service development process is not linear or immediate and decisions are rarely taken on the basis of research evidence alone. We will evaluate WISERD's KE activities by:-

- Encouraging and supporting researchers to monitor and evaluate their KE activities and the impact of their research during and beyond the life of the original project
- Taking a KE Progress Report to WISERD Co-directors on an annual basis (with quarterly up-dates). The annual report will:-
  - Monitor progress on key actions (see 5 below)
  - Evaluate KE using a case study approach (that includes qualitative feedback from research users and WISERD staff and associates)
  - Make recommendations for improvement.

### Key actions for 2012/13

<b>KE Objective</b>	<b>Key actions, academic year 2012/13</b>
1. Deliver a programme of research that delivers relevant and useful evidence in support of Welsh policy and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establish 4 research themes as the foci for research and KE activity</li> <li>• submit applications for x inter-disciplinary policy relevant research projects</li> <li>• produce x evidence review reports</li> <li>• develop a proposal for Welsh Policy Institute</li> </ul>
2. Provide a sustainable infrastructure for research and knowledge exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review quantitative research training requirements in conjunction with the Wales Doctoral Training Centre</li> <li>• provide training on knowledge exchange and presenting to academics</li> <li>• provide training to non-academics on knowledge exchange and consumption of research</li> <li>• further develop the WISERD GeoPortal as outlined in successful ESRC KE bid</li> <li>• establish a WISERD champion for the development of a Welsh “data integration hub”</li> <li>• submit at least one application to each ESRC KE funding call and actively look for other opportunities for KE funding (including possible applications to other funding schemes such as seminar series funding)</li> <li>• respond to the review of the WISERD thematic networks and develop work in this area accordingly</li> </ul>
3. Support researchers to engage effectively in knowledge exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the research grant bid development process, provide pre-bid advice for those developing research grant bids, including the identification of key stakeholders to contribute to the development of the bid</li> <li>• provide advice to researchers on dissemination and engagement with research users throughout the life of the research project</li> <li>• assist with the identification of research users and stakeholders</li> </ul>

	<p>for those already working on research projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide training on knowledge exchange and presenting to researchers</li> <li>• Develop tailored guidance on measuring and maximising impact (including having impact beyond the life of the original project) by distilling and, where necessary, extending guidance already available from the ESRC and other sources</li> <li>• Disseminate examples of good knowledge exchange practice via presentations at conferences/seminars; inclusion of articles in WISERD News and development of a KE section on the WISERD website</li> <li>• Provide researchers with one to one advice and guidance on knowledge exchange and impact matters</li> </ul>
<p>4. Create opportunities for a genuine dialogue and shared understanding with research users</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold regular meetings with the WG to discuss respective research strategies and possibilities for collaborative working</li> <li>• Hold meetings with other public and third sector research users to discuss key areas of interest and potential collaborative research ideas</li> <li>• Further develop WISERD's associate membership network to further engage with research users</li> <li>• Run a programme of evidence symposia in partnership with WG</li> <li>• Organise KE focused seminar series' in collaboration with the Welsh Government and/or other research users</li> <li>• Organise a WISERD annual conference and promote to research users</li> <li>• Organise x Placement/internship with a non-academic organisation</li> </ul>
<p>5.Improve our communication of research/evidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open up WISERD's lunch time seminars to external researchers, PhD students and research users</li> <li>• Develop a data-base of key stakeholders/research users</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite research users to subscribe to WISERD's mailing lists and WISERD News</li> <li>• Circulate the WISERD E-newsletter and WISERD News to research users on request.</li> <li>• Circulate WISERD Research Reports and Policy Briefings to relevant research users</li> <li>• Organise KE focused seminar series' in collaboration with the Welsh Government and/or other research users</li> <li>• Develop an engagement strategy for attracting research users to WISERD annual conference</li> <li>• Review potential demand for breakfast briefings/networking events</li> <li>• Utilise Cardiff University's Public Affairs Manager to disseminate reports via their established networks</li> <li>• Establish dedicated KE pages on the WISERD website</li> <li>• Add "policy activity/expertise" to WISERD's soon to be developed Directory of Expertise and staff bios on the People web-pages.</li> </ul>
6. Develop strategic agreements with key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a data-base of key stakeholders/research users</li> <li>• Develop a strategic agreement/MOU with Welsh Government</li> <li>• Explore the potential for strategic agreements with other key stakeholders/user organisations</li> </ul>
7. Evaluate the effectiveness of WISERD's KE strategy and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put in place a series of annual reviews, with the first review to take place in August 2013</li> <li>• Quarterly updates on progress with regard to KE, to be provided to the WISERD Executive Team</li> </ul>