Research Wales Innovation Fund Strategy 2023/24 – 2027/28

Institution:	The Open University (OU) in Wales
RWIF strategy lead:	Lynnette Thomas, Deputy Director – Strategy and Development (Wales)
Email:	lynnette.thomas@open.ac.uk

Section A: Overview

1. Strategic ambitions

Please provide an overview of your institution's five year approach to supporting knowledge exchange activities and how these will be supported by RWIF. You may wish to highlight broad areas which you are targeting, and how these align with your institutional mission and internal strategies. [max 250 words]

The OU's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. Social justice is at the heart of what we do, founded on an ambition to give anyone, anywhere the power to learn. Our Learn and Live strategy 2022-2027 outlines societal impact as one of its five goals, delivered through research, enterprise, and skills development and our Welsh vision for Learn and Live Wales reflects our own policy context and external environment. Our Research Plan and Knowledge Exchange Plan set out a direction of travel for this strategy aiming to enhance societal impact through 'Open Societal Challenges' building collaborations between the university and external partnerships with a thematic focus on areas of:

- Tackling Inequalities
- Sustainability
- Living Well

Collaborations within and across all four nations will maximise the benefits of our unique reach. In Wales we will build upon the previous RWIF, evolving our activities founded on a strong evaluation base.

These areas of focus will have the greatest impact in Wales in terms of meeting HEFCW's vision for Research and Innovation and enabling social and economic prosperity. Our delivery will focus on three pillars of engagement:

1. **Progression partnerships**, especially with FE
2. **Impact and engagement** through co-designed, place-based and research-led community and citizen engagement programmes
3. **Business, skills and innovation**, working with employers and the workforce

We will continue to develop and promote our bilingual, free learning platforms OpenLearn Cymru / Wales and resources and promote our research and innovation through our public engagement programme to all.

2. Capacity Grant

Provide some narrative on how your institution plans to make use of the £250k capacity grant included within RWIF. How will this be used to support and enhance capacity and incentivise and improve performance in knowledge exchange? [max 250 words]

The RWIF capacity grant forms a very important part of this funding for the OU in Wales. The capacity grant will be prioritised to:

- Support the continuation of posts at the OU in Wales office to ensure we retain high calibre staff.
- Fund activity that will build upon the co-designed, collaborative partnership approach that has started to have real impact in communities across Wales.
- Embed and evaluate work at earlier stages of delivery to add value to activities and secure an innovative and fail fast culture.
- Support research and knowledge exchange in Wales that address societal challenges through connecting into networks, partner organisations and Welsh priorities.
- Further develop our work with employers on skills development.

This funding ensures sufficient administrative, activity, and programme support resources are made available from the OU in Wales office.

We currently support a total of 10 continuation posts either fully or part-funded through RWIF. We will also recruit for two current staff vacancies and create one new post to build on collaborative work funded through previous HEFCW investment.

These posts support the three pillars of our engagement plus our public engagement programme and our OpenLearn Cymru and OpenLearn Wales developments and resources.

Section B: Specific content

3. Commercialisation / income generating activity

RWIF has been designed to incentivise and reward performance, particularly in terms of external income capture.

Provide details of how RWIF will be used to enable your institution to grow its external income as measured by HE-BCI. What are the key areas of investment and growth? How will funding be used to build on previous RWIF investments? What new activity will be supported? Further guidance on this section is available in Circular W23/12HE. Your response should be framed in terms of the impact of RWIF on the social and economic prosperity for Wales. [500 words max]

Please highlight centres of research excellence that already operate as innovation hubs.

The OU in Wales will continue to engage in commercialisation and income-generating activities and building on the positive changes RWIF funding has enabled in the last three years. By leveraging the RWIF, the OU in Wales will increase commercial income from employers and undertake influencing for other funding sources, to particularly grow registrations on microcredentials and short courses.

The RWIF has been instrumental in developing the OU in Wales's OpenSkills Academy (OSA). We have been through a period of test and learn and developed an innovative search tool, which uses GPT as a machine learning model to match the needs of employers to OU curriculum. OSA will be rolled out across Wales within this RWIF strategy period and will help employers and individuals upskill by creating easy to access free, government funded and paid for short courses, microcredentials and OpenLearn bilingual free learning. Alongside development of the search tool, the OU in Wales has utilised RWIF funded staff to evidence employer demand for using automated searches for skills/CPD development. The OSA will satisfy the evidenced need in Wales before being expanded for use across all four nations of the UK.

This strategy period will prioritise growth of new and existing relationships between the OU in Wales and industry. Degree apprenticeships and development of the OSA in previous years has provided a strong platform to build upon, leading to income generation opportunities with organisations like Chwarae Teg and the Cardiff Capital Region Venture scheme, as well as strategic sectoral relationships with bodies like FinTech Wales. RWIF funding will provide the staff capacity required to grow further, creating relationships with new partners and employers. This will help the OU in Wales learn from industry experience and initiate knowledge transfer and exchange between OU academics, OU in Wales staff and industry sectors in Wales to try and attract new external funding.

In addition to strong links with Regional Skills Partnerships, the OU in Wales will create capacity to build on early-stage relationships with City and Growth Deals across Wales. For example, we will continue to provide resource to the Swansea Bay Growth Deal Skills & Talent Programme, which is one of the projects for the region which provides skills and employability support to enhance the region's needs to service each of the projects.

As part of this work we will further strengthen our links with industry network organisations, utilising their links to key sectors and under-represented groups, such as those from Black, Asian and Middle Eastern communities based in Wales opening up widening access and greater reach to hard to reach communities. We will also work with partners to support employers and sectors to encourage more women into STEM based careers.

Through RWIF, the OU in Wales will facilitate programme and collaborations to create positive social and economic impact and contribute to the prosperity of Wales.

3.1 Provide details of your institution's strategic KPIs for commercialisation and income generating activity:

Short course income generation	**23-24**	**24-25**	**25-26**
KPI 1: Numbers of individuals registering on microcredentials	145	152	160

Baseline: 138 + 5% annually			
KPI 2: Number of individuals undertaking non-accredited short courses Baseline: 0	10	20	30
KPI 3: Revenue generated through corporate learning relationships and microcredentials Baseline: £3,033,864 + 5% annually	£3,185,557	£3,344,834	£3,512,075

4. New business growth and skills support

Outline the support you intend to provide for new start-ups, spin-offs, and meeting the targets of schemes such as the WG's Youth Entrepreneurship Programme. Provide information on where RWIF will add value to existing activities, and where it allows you to invest in further growth. Outline how RWIF will be used to develop a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation for students, graduates and members of staff. Further guidance on this section is available in Circular W23/12HE. Your response should be framed in terms of social and economic prosperity for Wales.
[500 words max]

Through our expansive relationships with FE colleges across Wales, we will continue to develop our relationships to increase the use of OU curriculum to support learner skills needs and local and regional economic priorities. The quality of our online learning provision provides strong progression pathways for FE college leavers, who may prefer more flexible modes of study to develop their skills upon entering the workplace.

Through building opportunities with FE colleges, we will increase learner numbers and test new collaborative projects while diversifying our reach across Wales. We will also contribute to student success through a better understanding of FE student needs as they consider progression to higher learning.

The OU has launched a new initiative 'Open Business Creators' to encourage and support OU students, staff and graduates across the UK to develop the skills to create a business. This includes access to mentoring services and providing connections with OU alumni and partners to support. As part of our wider commitment to entrepreneurship, there will be a content hub on OpenLearn providing free courses and resources for those developing their business ideas. The OU in Wales will utilise RWIF funding to link Wales based connections in the Open Business Creators platform. This will provide ease of access to entrepreneurship advice and funding to Welsh students and graduates. The Open Business Creators will also encourage students and graduates across the UK to compete for funding from the OU to help turn concepts into reality.

The new funding for GO Wales is providing an opportunity to trial new initiatives to enhance student and graduate employability, as well as create skilled individuals who will be able to help fill vacancies. In 2023/24, we will pilot some activity on GO Wales to work alongside the Open Business Creators, which will be the first time the OU in Wales has used this funding for entrepreneurship.

Innovation is essential to achieve the OU's mission and central to our Learn and Live Strategy. The development of an Innovation Foundry will support the university to translate innovative ideas into impact, both inside and outside the OU. RWIF provides staff capacity to ensure that new innovative ideas such as the OpenSkills Academy can prosper. It will also provide students and graduates in Wales with the opportunity to submit ideas for innovation through the Open Business Creators platform.

RWIF funding will provide additional capacity for the OU in Wales to maintain strong relationships with all Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) in Wales. We are in a unique position where we are represented on all four RSPs. This provides us with insights into regional priorities and helps to position our skills/CPD programmes to meet geographical needs.

RWIF funding provides us with the capacity to develop an Employer Engagement Plan, which will focus on employability, innovation and skills. It will align with key elements of the Welsh Government's Innovation Strategy and Employability and Skills Strategy and provide strategic employer engagement objectives for delivering valuable skills/CPD provision for the benefit of the Welsh economy.

4.1 Provide details of your institution's strategic KPIs for new business growth and skills support

Measure	Targets per year (accumulative)		
	23-24	**24-25**	**25-26**
KPI 4: Number of learners engaged through FE activity. Baseline:1,000 + 5% annually	1,050	1,103	1,159

CPD KPIs (using HE-BCI survey data)

Measure	Targets per year (accumulative)		
	23-24	**24-25**	**25-26**
KPI 5: Total learner days of CPD/CE courses delivered (FTE equivalent) Baseline: 409 + 5% annually	429	450	473
KPI 6: Number of partners/employers participating in CPD increased	173	182	191

Baseline:162 + 5% annually			

5. Civic Mission and Public Engagement

Outline how RWIF will support continued or new activity across your communities. Place-based civic mission is broad, incorporating a vast range of activities including support within the community to meet the skills needs of industry, HE-FE partnerships in skills, innovation and engagement, public engagement through research, and helping to address societal challenges. Support for the community within university premises for e.g. events, lectures etc, would also be a means of supporting civic mission. Further guidance on this section is available in Circular W23/12HE. Your response should be framed in terms of social and economic prosperity for Wales. [500 words max]

Working collaboratively with citizens, organisations and communities, the OU in Wales will seek to deliver significant economic and social benefits through our societal impact. Through matching our academic expertise with stakeholders, we will address societal challenges and make a positive difference to the people in Wales.

We will continue to prioritise staff capacity and activities in this area to work in and with communities and those who serve them, listening to their needs, and offering co-produced solutions.

The OU's Open Societal Challenges platform launched internally in 2022 to develop a more cohesive approach to research across the OU and strengthen connections and collaboration opportunities for greater impact. This platform will invite external collaborators to identify new or existing challenges relevant to their communities and match with OU academic expertise to help address these together through research and knowledge exchange.

RWIF funding will enable the support and development of Wales based research and knowledge exchange with a key focus on the three thematic areas outlined in the Open Societal Challenges programme. These will also be aligned to Welsh Government and HEFCW/Commission for Tertiary Education and Research priorities.

We will build on our well-developed programmes and strategic focus areas from the previous RWIF strategy as follows:

- Fostering critical thinking and building an informed and engaged citizenship:
    - Produce resources
    - Explore partnership opportunities for developing our active citizenship work and supporting the Welsh Government's 'students as citizens' agenda
    - Enhance our understanding of communities across Wales through partnerships

- Enhancing our offer of free, bilingual, online learning:
    - Invest in new bilingual educational resources and skills-focused courses on OpenLearn.

- Work with partners to extend the reach of resources and identify and address gaps in provision.
- Continue to deliver OpenLearn Champions and OU Ambassadors programmes to partner organisations across sectors sharing the vast array of OpenLearn resources.

- Developing and sharing OU research and knowledge to the people of Wales:
  - Align OU research with Welsh stakeholders to develop and showcase our research impact and academic expertise.

Everything we do will be underpinned by partnership and collaboration. We will continue to develop and strengthen strategic partnerships with sectors to build upon research, knowledge exchange, civic mission and upskilling. We will continue to pursue sector level partnerships with the objective of upscaling sector wide programmes across Wales. Our focus will be on partnerships with FE, schools. housing associations, third sector organisations, trade unions and skills partners.

Our commitment to collaboration is demonstrated through our membership of:

- Wales Innovation Network – developing collaborative research and innovation bids.
- Civic Mission Network - continuing to play an active role with Deputy Director as Chair to share best practice, avoid duplication and identify gaps in engagement geographically.
- PolicyWISE - a unique UK and Ireland comparative policy research and knowledge exchange initiative that will change and improve how governments and academics work together in and across nations to help solve policy challenges.

5.1 Provide details of your institution's strategic KPIs for civic mission and public engagement

Measure	Targets per year			Civic mission framework area of action
	23-24	24-25	25-26	
KPI 7: Number of people reached through our civic mission and public engagement activity. Baseline: 184,268 + 5% annually	193,481	203,155	213,312	• Leading place • Developing active citizenship
KPI 8: Number of learners / participants engaged through civic mission and public engagement activity.	11,105	11,660	12,243	• Leading place • Developing active citizenship

Baseline: 10,577 + 5% annually				
KPI 9: Number of partner organisations engaged through civic mission and public engagement collaboration. Baseline: 75 + 5% annually (accumulative – not all new)	79	83	87	• Leading place • Contributing to raising educational standards by developing links with schools, colleges and other learning environments
KPI 10: Development of funded applied research and knowledge exchange in Wales. Baseline: 8 (target accumulative – not all new)	8	9	9	• Leading place • Developing active citizenship • Developing a national response to a global issue

Section C: Alignment to policy and priorities
6. Alignment to Welsh and UK Policy

Describe how your RWIF strategy aligns with relevant place based regional, Welsh, and UK policies such as e.g. local city region / regional growth deals. (See Circular W23/12HE, paragraph 30) [500 words max]

The external landscape is changing rapidly. Institutionally our Research and Knowledge Exchange plans allow us to align with Welsh Government, UK and international priorities and adapt to the insights afforded to us by our collaborators.

Our institutional research plan has been informed by the challenges presented in reports, concordats and policies such as the UK Innovation Strategy, R&D People and Culture Strategy, Levelling Up the United Kingdom and the UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) EDI Strategy, and aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The OU's KE plan has been informed by the UK Government KE agenda, the KE Framework (KEF) and the KE Concordat (KEC) as mechanisms to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the use of public funding for KE and further a culture of continuous improvement in universities. In addition, the plan identifies and aligns to the strategic priority areas that differ across the four nations due to devolved government.

Nationally and locally, by co-designing and collaborating in our engagement, be that research, knowledge exchange or upskilling, with partner organisations and communities, our RWIF plan will remain relevant and address societal needs. This approach supports the vision for Wales articulated within HEFCW's Research and Innovation Vision aligning with the pillars of Excellence, Place, Innovation and Collaboration.

This RWIF strategy includes a focus on FE partnerships in line with the cross-sector collaboration ambitions to be supported through the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER). This way of working is a natural evolution for the OUiW as we already work in partnership with every college in Wales across several initiatives supporting skills development and knowledge exchange.

Through active engagement in national and regional networks including the Civic Mission Network, Wales Innovation Network and the four Regional Skills Partnerships, we will maximise insight and opportunities for collaboration to achieve greater impact for the people of Wales. Through this strategy we will build skills capacity in the workforce, address regional and national skill gaps and meet skills priorities, and enhance the nation's capacity to think critically and socially.

We will support and enhance the Welsh Government's education ambitions including the objectives within the Wales National Mission roadmap, through our RWIF activities we will deliver work that aligns with the Education Minister's priorities including Wales as a "second-chance nation" and the "students as citizens" agenda. Our work is also informed by and supportive off the Welsh Government's Innovation Strategy and Employability and Skills plan; underpinning all of this is our commitment to the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

7. Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015	
Provide specific information on how the RWIF strategy will support the seven goals, and five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015; [250 words max]	
Well-being goal	
Prosperous Wales	Bridging skills gaps; promoting lifelong learning; supporting deprived communities; increased employability; improved relationships between FE/HE and business community.
Resilient Wales	Citizen science and place-based research with focus on environmental sustainability aligned to Societal Challenges.
More Equal Wales	Specific support for Widening Access communities to remove learning barriers; enhancing active citizenship; provide platforms for underrepresented groups; improved digital skills.
Healthier Wales	Direct correlation between access to learning and improved mental health and well-being; increased employability leading to reduced poverty, thereby better health outcomes.

Wales of Cohesive Communities	Citizen-engaged research and activities bringing people together; focus on the role of universities at the heart of communities; work targeted at under-represented communities.
Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language	Changing the way society thinks about learning and the culture surrounding that; commitment to making free online learning resources in both languages; activities based in Welsh-speaking deprived communities.
Globally-responsible Wales	Enhancement of critical thinking and active citizenship; part of a UK-wide university; enhancement of Wales relevant research sharing learning across the UK and beyond.
Way of Working	
Long-term	Focus on tackling long-term skills gaps and intergenerational poverty through learning; increasing the nation's long-term capacity for critical thought.
Integration	Research integrated into the needs, trends and priorities of localities and regions in Wales; collaboration with FE and other sectors; part of a UK-wide university linked into UK Government priorities as well as Welsh Government priorities.
Involvement	Working directly with citizens; specific in-community work using community assets such as libraries and schools.
Collaboration	Collaboration with FE, private sector core building block of the OUiW approach.
Prevention	Focus on long-term trends, using learning and research to plug gaps, identify trends, meet regional and national needs.

8. Impact on Welsh Language	
Outline the positive impact RWIF investment will have on opportunities to use and support the Welsh language. Where appropriate you may wish to refer to the themes in the Cymraeg 2050 action plan. [250 words max]	
Cymraeg 2050 theme	
Increasing the number of Welsh speakers	Through our links with FE colleges (e.g. National Enrichment Programme), introduce bilingual OpenLearn courses as part of Welsh medium learning pathways.
Increasing the use of Welsh	Increase the number of bilingual courses and resources available on OpenLearn Cymru. Continue to promote bilingual courses and resources on OpenLearn Cymru: -

	- Through OU Ambassadors and OpenLearn Champion training to partner organisation staff. - Through schools' networks to highlight University Ready collection. - Croeso! beginners Welsh to partners to help upskill the basic language skills of their workforce. Ensure that staff recruited through the funding have Welsh as a desirable or essential skill and opportunity to develop their Welsh language skills in the workplace. Ensure that Welsh speakers can continue to contribute in the Welsh language at OU public learning events.
Creating favourable conditions – infrastructure and context	Encourage and support OU academics to connect with Welsh speaking and Wales-based partner organisations. Promote and champion the Welsh language, Welsh culture and wider Welsh context to OU colleagues across the UK to support them to carry out research, knowledge exchange and engagement in Wales.
Other opportunities to use and support the Welsh language	Promote Welsh language OpenLearn courses – such as Everyday Skills in Maths – to Welsh-medium employers as part of CPD opportunities for staff. Influencing the wider OU Scholarship Strategy to encourage staff to undertake research that supports Wales priorities, including the Welsh language and culture.

Section D: Use of Research Wales Innovation Funding

How is your RWIF allocation 2023/24 being used to deliver the strategy set out in Section B, and what are your anticipated priorities for the use of RWIF funds in future years? [250 words max – or append a table outlining broad investment areas]

Our RWIF allocation 2023/24 is being used to primarily fund several strategic and support posts (detailed below) to deliver three pillars of activity and two enablers:

- Progression partnerships
- Impact and engagement
- Business, skills and innovation
    - OpenLearn Wales/Cymru
    - Public engagement

Specifically, the funding will provide continuity to 10 posts (fully or part-funded by RWIF) working in these areas:

- 2 project and administrative support
- 3 public engagement and digital content production
- 4 partnerships sector development, progression and impact
- 1 business, skills and innovation

We will also recruit for two current staff vacancies and create one new post to build on collaborative work funded through previous HEFCW investment.

- 1 business, skills and innovation
- 1 partnerships sector progression and impact
- 1 public engagement and digital content production

Funding will also be used for recurrent costs in relation to public facing activities and project developments.

Looking forward to future years, it is expected that the future RWIF funding will maintain the created posts and continue to fund activity around engagement and learning opportunities in line with this strategy.

Section E: **Regulatory Requirements** *NB: HEFCW may request further information / clarification on any of these areas*	
i) Welsh Language Standards (2018) *[Use the drop down menu]*	This strategy complies with Welsh Language Standards 2018
ii) Equality Impact Assessment *[Use the drop down menu]*	This strategy has been Equality Impact Assessed
iii) Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) *[Use the drop down menu]*	This strategy will contribute towards the aims of the WFG Act 2015
I confirm that the University is committed to the principles of the Knowledge Exchange Concordat and is fully committed to its eight guiding principles.	
Signature: **Vice Chancellor**	
Date	30 June 2023