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Uwch Cymru
Higher Education Funding
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BBC Cymru Wales



Press release

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Title: New Welsh Beacon to bring universities and public closer

People in Wales will be able to play a much more interactive role in the work of higher education institutions thanks to a collaborative partnership of leading Welsh organisations.

Cardiff University, University of Glamorgan, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, Techniquest and BBC Wales have come together and successfully bid to become Wales' only Beacon for Public Engagement, and will now lead Welsh universities in working more closely with the public.

The Beacon for Wales will encourage universities to make wider contributions to society by engaging communities more fully in their work and is part of the biggest initiative of its kind ever launched in the UK.

A total of six beacons are to be set up, including others in Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich, London, and Edinburgh. There will also be a UK-wide co-ordinating centre based in Bristol, which will work across the initiative to promote best practice and provide a single point of contact for the whole higher education sector. The Beacon for

Wales was chosen from 87 bidders from around the UK, and will share in a £9.2M funding pot over four years.

Acting as a catalyst for other higher education institutions across Wales, the Beacon for Wales will open up opportunities for people outside academic communities to better understand, support and challenge research undertaken in universities.

Professor Ken Woodhouse, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Engagement at Cardiff University, the lead partner in the Beacon for Wales, said: “This initiative will ensure that the public has a greater understanding of the work of higher education institutions, as well as making sure our universities understand how the public feels about issues ranging from science, business and the arts, to language, the environment, history and health.

“We are excited at the prospect of working with our partners to spread ambition and best practice that will inspire academic and research staff across the whole of Wales. We are keen to see public engagement activities such as debates, dialogues or exhibitions, media appearances or outreach work become as much of a priority for university staff as the more traditional roles. This is why one of our earliest tasks is to put in place the right structure to support academia in planning and delivering innovative and rewarding activities that run side by side with research and teaching.”

Beacons for Public Engagement is funded by the UK higher education funding councils including the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and Research Councils UK (RCUK), in association with the Wellcome Trust. It brings together a number of different funders with the common goal of achieving a more joined up and embedded approach to public engagement and was created in response to a survey that identified barriers to participation in public engagement by higher education institutions.

The Welsh Beacon will address these issues by taking practical steps to encourage and reward innovative, exciting engagement activities that reach all groups throughout Wales. It will pilot four new public engagement programmes and develop best practice guidance on how to reach audiences with activities that encourage social, ethical and scientific debate. The four pilot projects will explore subjects as varied as our place in

the future; health and well being; climate and sustainability and the Welsh identity in the 21st century.

Professor Rod Dubrow-Marshall, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Glamorgan said: “Our Beacon is about engaging with, listening to and learning from the communities with whom we live and work and we are ready to put our plans into action. By combining the expertise, experience and geographical reach of these leading Welsh institutions, the Beacon for Wales will give public engagement a renewed sense of status, a renewed sense of purpose and a renewed energy, not only within our institutions but throughout Wales.”

Professor Philip Gummatt, Chief Executive of HEFCW, said: "Backing this initiative with other UK partners has given us a wonderful opportunity to support institutions in Wales to build on their existing excellent work to make what they do more understandable to the public in Wales, as well as get a real dialogue going. The diversity of the partners within the Beacon for Wales means they will be able to collectively work with and learn from communities all across our nation."

Speaking on behalf of Research Councils UK, Professor Alan Thorpe, RCUK Champion for Science in Society and Chief Executive of the Natural Environment Research Council, said, ‘Much of the work carried out by higher education institutions has a direct effect on people’s lives, so it is important that they are able to access them and have their say. The Beacons will do this by giving people the chance to get involved directly. They will also help redefine what it means to be a university in the 21st century, making public interactions and social considerations a core part of the role of any member of staff or student in any discipline.’

First Minister Rhodri Morgan said: “Wales is gaining a reputation as a world-class “research hub” with a wealth of very exciting research being undertaken at Welsh universities, which is relevant to our everyday lives. I welcome this initiative because I am confident that it will bring the work of Wales’ academic talent to a wider audience.”

ENDS

For more information and interviews on behalf of the Beacon for Wales contact:

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Notes to Editors

Other partners' comments on being part of the Beacon for Wales

Ceri Black, Head of Learning, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

"Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales is looking forward to working with Cardiff University, the University of Glamorgan, Techniquest and BBC Wales on this exciting initiative, which will build on and develop our skills in communicating with a wide variety of audiences and groups and firmly establish Wales as a leader in the field of public engagement."

Cathryn Allen, Head of Broadcast Development, BBC Wales

"BBC Wales is always seeking new ways to enrich its engagement with its audience and the Beacon for Wales offers an exciting opportunity to work with partners in order to innovate within this area."

Peter Trevitt, Chief Executive Officer, Techniquest

"Techniquest is delighted to be part of the Beacon for Wales and is looking forward to beginning work with the partnership. As an educational charity with a mission to engage people in science, the Beacon provides a welcome framework to strengthen dialogue between the public, scientists and the academic community, especially in important areas such as climate change and medical sciences."

About the Beacon for Wales

The Beacon for Wales will pioneer new techniques in public engagement across Wales, and then share that experience across the UK Beacon network.

The partners will establish a Wales Higher Education Engagement Network (WHEEN) to provide opportunities for HE staff and students to network and share ideas on public engagement; appoint a high-level champion for public engagement, working with senior staff and university management to negotiate any necessary changes in policies and

employment practices; establish an awards system recognising engagement excellence in a variety of sectors; and pilot four projects to test approaches to new audiences and new techniques.

About the Beacons for Public Engagement

The Beacons for Public Engagement initiative will recognise, reward and build capacity for increased communication between academics and researchers and the wider community not currently engaged with universities through research, teaching and knowledge-transfer. It was created in response to a survey by the Royal Society, RCUK and the Wellcome Trust that identified barriers to participation in public engagement by higher education institutions, ranging from the pressure to publish research papers and attract funding, to parity of esteem between research and engagement activities.

The six Beacons - collaborative centres made up of a number of higher education institutions (HEIs) and partnership organisations - will be at the forefront of efforts to change the culture in universities, assisting staff and students to engage with the public. They involve networks of partners including further education colleges, museums, galleries, business, charities, TV and press, and public bodies.

The National Co-ordinating Centre is made up of the University of Bristol, University of the West of England and other partners

The other five Beacons are:

- University of Newcastle / Durham University / Centre for Life
- University of Manchester / Manchester Metropolitan/University of Salford and other partners
- University of Edinburgh / Heriot-Watt University / Napier University / University of Highlands and Islands and other partners
- University College London / Southbank Centre / British Museum and other partners
- University of East Anglia and other partners

About the Beacon For Wales Partners

1. Cardiff University

Cardiff University is recognised in independent government assessments as one of Britain's leading teaching and research universities. Founded by Royal Charter in 1883, the University today combines impressive modern facilities and a dynamic approach to teaching and research. The University's breadth of expertise in research and research-led teaching encompasses: the humanities; the natural, physical, health, life and social sciences; engineering and technology; preparation for a wide range of professions; and a longstanding commitment to lifelong learning. Cardiff is a member of the Russell Group of Britain's leading research universities. <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk>

2. University of Glamorgan

The University of Glamorgan is a modern and thriving university based in South Wales. It has two main campuses, one in Treforest near Pontypridd and another in the heart of Cardiff city centre. The University is currently pursuing one of the most ambitious development plans in UK higher education totalling £55 million.

<http://www.glam.ac.uk>

3. BBC Wales

BBC Wales produces thousands of hours of television and radio each year and, provides the nation's most popular websites (bbc.co.uk/wales and bbc.co.uk/cymru).

English language programmes are broadcast across BBC Radio Wales and three television networks - BBC One Wales, BBC Two Wales, and BBC 2W and, with nearly 8,000 hours of radio and television in Welsh each year on BBC Radio Cymru and S4C - including Pobol y Cwm, the longest-running BBC TV soap opera anywhere in the world - BBC Wales provides more broadcasting in a single minority language than any other broadcaster in the world. BBC Wales is also responsible for some of the most talked about programmes on network television including Doctor Who, Torchwood, and the award-winning documentary Tribe.

In addition to its broadcast output, BBC Wales engages with audiences across Wales in a range of face-to-face activities. These include events such as Proms in the Park, Cardiff Singer of the World, Children in Need, and the community outreach programme Here for You.

4. Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales

The National Museum of Wales was established by Royal Charter in 1907 and is registered as a legal entity and charity under this name. Today this organization, which runs seven national museums across Wales, is Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales, or simply Amgueddfa Cymru.

An independent registered charity, Amgueddfa Cymru receives its core funding through grant-in-aid from the Welsh Assembly Government as an Assembly Government Sponsored Body (AGSB).

Its core objective is 'the advancement of the education of the public'. This involves developing, caring for, studying and sustaining access to Wales's national collections for the benefit of society in perpetuity. The Charter (which was revised 1991 and 2006) states that this is to be achieved:

- (i) primarily, by the comprehensive representation of science, art, industry, history and culture of, or relevant to, Wales, and
- (ii) generally, by the collection, recording, preservation, elucidation and presentation of objects and things and associated knowledge, whether connected or not with Wales, which are calculated to further the enhancement of understanding and the promotion of research.

Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales operates seven sites across Wales, these are:

National Museum Cardiff, St Fagans: National History Museum, the National Roman Legionary Museum, Caerleon, Big Pit: National Coal Museum, Blaenafon, National Wool Museum, Dre-fach, Felindre, National Slate Museum, Llanberis, and the National Waterfront Museum, Swansea.

Entry to each Museum is free thanks to the support of the Welsh Assembly Government.

5. Techniquest

Techniquest is an educational charity based in Cardiff with a Wales-wide mission to engage people in science and motivate them to learn more. The organisation runs the popular Techniquest science and discovery centre which attracts 180,000 public and school visitors per year with support from the Welsh Assembly Government. Established 21 yrs ago, the centre, which was one of the pioneers of its kind, has now built a strong international reputation as a leader and innovator in its field. Following its final move to a

permanent home within the new Cardiff Bay development, the organisation has worked hard to increase the reach of its activities, with services locally available in many parts of Wales reaching another 150,000 visitors per year. Partnership is central to the success of Techniquet and to its ambitious plans for overcoming barriers to science engagement with the widest possible audiences.

About Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) is an Assembly Government Sponsored Body responsible for administering funds made available by the Welsh Assembly Government in support of:

- education in higher education institutions (HEIs);
- research undertaken by HEIs; and
- higher education courses at further education colleges.

HEFCW is also responsible for accrediting providers of initial teaching training for school teachers and commissioning research to improve the standards of teachers and teacher training.

In addition to its funding responsibilities, HEFCW provides advice to the Welsh Assembly Government on the funding needs, aspirations and concerns of the higher education sector in Wales.

wellcome^{trust} About The Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust is the largest charity in the UK. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending around £500 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust supports public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing. <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk>



About Research Councils UK

The seven Research Councils are independent non-departmental public bodies, funded by the Science Budget through the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). They are incorporated by Royal Charter and together manage a research budget of over £2.8 billion a year.

Research Councils UK (RCUK) is the partnership between the UK's seven Research Councils. Through RCUK, the Research Councils work together to champion the research, training and innovation they support.

The seven UK Research Councils are:

- Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC);
- Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC);
- Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC);
- Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC);
- Medical Research Council (MRC);
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC);
- Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC).



About HEFCE

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is responsible for distributing around £7.1 billion a year in public funds to universities and colleges, to support high quality education, research and related activities. HEFCE also has a leading role in developing and implementing policy for higher education, based on research and consultation.

About the Report

The recent report on attitude to public engagement is: 'Survey of factors affecting science communication by scientists and engineers', Royal Society, RCUK and Wellcome Trust, June 2006, available at <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/page.asp?id=3180>

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Wales' leading lights to become Beacon for Wales and public engagement

(Left to right)

Mike Tooby, Director of Learning and Programmes, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales;

(back) Karen Lewis, Partnerships Manager, BBC Wales;

(front) Dr Rachel Iredale, Senior Research Associate, University of Glamorgan;

Prof Ken Woodhouse, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Engagement, Cardiff University;

Peter Trevitt, Chief Executive, Techniquist;