

Circular

Review of Research Policy: Outcomes

26 July 2007

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in
Wales

Summary: This Circular presents the finalised versions
of the Council's revised statement of its
research policy objectives and the
associated broad supporting funding
scenario.

Response by: No response required.

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INTRODUCTION

- 1 This Circular presents the finalised versions of the Council's revised statement of its research policy objectives and the associated broad supporting funding scenario.

BACKGROUND

- 2 The Council's research funding method will require revision following the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in order to articulate with the outcomes of that exercise. Before embarking on this work, however, the Council agreed firstly to undertake a review of its research policy in order to establish an up-to-date understanding of the objectives and the purposes for which the funding is provided.
- 3 In Spring 2007, a proposed revised statement of the Council's research policy objectives was published for consultation, together with a broad supporting funding scenario (Circular W07/04HE). The statement and funding scenario have now been finalised in the light of responses received to that consultation.

REVISED STATEMENT OF POLICY OBJECTIVES

- 4 The finalised version of the statement of research policy objectives is attached at **Annex A**.

BROAD FUNDING SCENARIO

- 5 The consultation paper proposed a broad funding scenario to support the proposed policy objectives. This scenario consisted of:
 - QR funding – allocated on the basis of the outcomes of the 2008 RAE to reward and reinforce research excellence
 - PGR funding – following previous consultation, the Council has already signalled its intention of establishing a consolidated PGR funding stream after the 2008 RAE by transferring the funding currently associated with the PGR minor volume measure in the QR formula into the PGR funding stream
 - capital funding for research
- 6 The broad funding scenario set out in the consultation paper also envisaged:
 - that the Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund will continue to play an important role in helping to strengthen and reshape the research base
 - that any further capacity-building initiative (along the lines of the Research Capacity Development Fund (RCDF)) would be a second-order priority and depend on the availability of funding.
- 7 The responses confirmed that the elements identified in the broad funding framework were generally considered appropriate, and that there did not seem to

be significant appetite for any radical change. Some respondents suggested the establishment of additional funding streams to support areas such as capacity building and the commercialisation of research. However, the majority agreed that capacity building is a second order priority and should not be implemented at the expense of QR. In the case of commercialisation of research, support is already provided through the Council's funding for Third Mission activities.

- 8 The Council has confirmed that its broad future funding scenario will be as set out in the consultation paper (summarised in paragraphs 5 and 6 above).

OTHER ISSUES

Research Concentration

- 9 The consultation paper also invited comments on a suggestion that HEFCW should seek to reshape the research base in Wales through a policy of concentration, by moving some selected subjects between institutions. This proposal attracted very little support, and the Council has agreed not to pursue it any further in the foreseeable future.

Research Sounding Group

- 10 The Council established a Research Sounding Group to assist with the policy review. The Group's contributions to the process proved very valuable to HEFCW and, for their part, several institutions commented that they welcomed the openness and opportunity for dialogue implied in this approach. The Council has therefore agreed to establish a Research Sounding Group on a standing basis, and will be considering its membership shortly.

Research Funding Method

- 11 Having established its policy objectives and the broad supporting funding framework, the Council will next need to review and modify the operational details of its research funding method. It envisages that it will provide the sector with further information on the proposed revised method in Spring 2008.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- 12 Any queries arising from this Circular should be directed to Linda Tiller (029 2068 2228; linda.tiller@hefcw.ac.uk).

HEFCW's RESEARCH POLICY OBJECTIVES: PROPOSED REVISED STATEMENT

Desired Characteristics of the Research Base in Wales include:

- A dynamic and innovative research base of a quality which compares favourably with the rest of the UK and internationally
- Sufficiently broadly based to respond flexibly to new and emerging challenges
- Research groupings of a size and disciplinary range to be effective and sustainable
- A research culture which encourages staff to perform to their full potential and facilitates the recruitment and development of leading researchers
- Is sustainable in the longer term, both financially and in terms of training and developing the next generation of researchers
- Generates high quality and original research which advances knowledge and practice and, where appropriate, provides a basis for application and knowledge transfer
- Supports the economy, society and culture of Wales
- Maximises opportunities to lever research income from external funders, including Research Councils, charities, business and the EU.

HEFCW will enable the sector to achieve the above by:

- Continuing to allocate research funding selectively on the basis of research excellence to recognise and reinforce high quality research
- Seeking to ensure that levels of research funding in Wales compare favourably with other parts of the UK, giving priority to ensuring that funding for top-rated research remains competitive
- Seeking to strengthen the research base by promoting genuine and effective collaborations which result in credible research groupings in terms of size, disciplinary reach and institutional support
- Funding a sufficiently broad research base to enable the sector to respond to emerging research opportunities
- Encouraging best practice in the management of institutional research strategies, in terms both of grant-seeking and ensuring (FEC) sustainability
- Monitoring institutional performance and impact, including providing analysis and feedback
- Seeking to ensure that the sector is well-placed to respond to the priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government, including the science policy, and to the priorities of the UK government and the EU, and to emerging global challenges.

The purpose of the funding which HEFCW provides through its main quality-driven research grant is: to give institutions the flexibility to determine the strategic direction of their research; to support emerging areas of research which are not yet sufficiently developed to attract external

funding; to support high quality research for which other external funding is either not required or not available; to help meet the balance of costs for those categories of research funding which do not currently pay full economic costs.

Other research or knowledge transfer funds may also be deployed from time to time in order to build capacity or promote the application of research.