

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Call for Expressions of Interest to enhance Regional Civic Engagement Partnership working

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Response by: 25 July 2024
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meg.hughes@medr.cymru (from 1 August)

This circular provides details of HEFCW funding to support regional civic partnership working and invites expressions of interest from three higher education institutions in Wales to develop and/or enhance existing regional civic engagement partnerships.

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) will cease operating after 31 July 2024. HEFCW's duties, responsibilities and staff will transfer to Medr, the [Commission for Tertiary Education and Research](#), from 1 August 2024. Any circulars that require attention after 1 August 2024 will be available on the Commission's website from August.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



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Background

1. Civic mission is an acknowledgement that universities in Wales have an obligation to improve the local and regional communities of which they are a part. Civic engagement is the process by which this is achieved.
2. The [Civic Mission Network](#), facilitated by Universities Wales, was established in 2020 to support the sector to develop approaches to civic engagement and build upon the ways in which they work in partnership to deliver the well-being goals of the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).
3. Civic mission, when driven by evidence-based analysis of the needs of place, creates significant benefits for local and regional communities in Wales. There are a number of examples of universities working with other civic partners, including other tertiary education providers, to co-create solutions to common challenges, which helps to maximise the contribution of civic activity to the economy and society. This way of working, outside of the sphere of competition and income generation, recognising and celebrating different institutions' strengths and contributions, is seen as the gold standard in developing, and delivering, civic engagement.
4. The 2019 UPP report [Truly Civic](#) recommended that universities develop a *'systematic and strategic approach to the civic role, based on an analysis of the needs of place'*. It also argued that closer and committed partnership working was required to maximise the contribution of universities to their locations, expressed through co-created Civic Agreements. Universities have begun to take a more strategic approach to meeting the needs of the communities in which they reside, supported by the work of the Civic Mission Network, however civic engagement activities are not always underpinned by formal agreements to work in partnership.
5. The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) will become operational from 1 August 2024. The Commission will have a strategic duty to promote a civic mission, which is defined in the Act as *"action for the purpose of promoting or improving the economic, social, environmental or cultural well-being of Wales, (including action aimed at achieving any of the well-being goals"*. The Commission will be under a duty to promote a civic mission by education providers in Wales (individually and/or collectively) within the further and the higher education sectors. The Commission may also seek to promote a civic mission by other persons that it funds under the Act, such as in respect of research and innovation. The Commission will also have strategic duties to promote collaboration and coherence across the tertiary education sector, and to promote lifelong learning.
6. The recently published [Statement of Priorities](#) for the Commission includes a focus on ensuring that the tertiary education system contributes to the economy and society, including by promoting further development of civic mission activity and ensuring that institutions learn from each other to benefit civic society and be valued members of their local communities.

7. This funding is to support the formalisation of regional civic partnership working and bolster existing mechanisms for engagement in preparation for the Commission taking up its responsibilities.

Regional Civic Engagement Partnership Funding

8. Funding of £81,000 for AY 2024/25 is available to incentivise closer and committed regional civic partnership working between universities and further education colleges, and other relevant partners. It is anticipated that the funding will be split equally between North, Mid/West and South Wales (£27k per region) and allocated to a lead institution for each region.
9. Building on the existing relationships between universities and colleges, the allocation should be used to support the formalisation of civic partnership working where formal agreements/ commitments to work in partnership to address regional challenges do not already exist.
10. Applicants are encouraged to consider how the partnerships will seek to engage with other tertiary education providers, including work-based learning providers, and adult and community education. Partnerships may also include other civic partners, such as local authorities, public and third sector partners, businesses and the community, as appropriate.
11. Universities are invited to consider their existing mechanisms/vehicles for regional civic engagement (e.g. networks, partnerships, civic agreements or commitments) and submit expressions of interest, in partnership with other universities and colleges in the region, outlining how funding will be used to:
 - a) enhance existing mechanisms/vehicles for regional civic engagement e.g. by engaging a wider range of partners;
and/or
 - b) develop new civic agreements/commitments to work in partnership to address regional challenges.
12. This flexibility is intended to enable institutions to adopt the most effective approach for their respective regions based on evaluation of previous interventions and to avoid duplicating efforts. It is also intended to take account of the fact that universities are at different stages in terms of developing their approaches to regional civic engagement, and that institutions in different geographical locations face different challenges.
13. It is expected that universities work with other universities and colleges in the region (and any other relevant partners) to nominate a lead institution to submit the expression of interest, endorsed and signed by the other partners in the region. The funding will be allocated to the lead institution in September 2024. A launch event will take place in November 2024, facilitated by Universities Wales. The event will showcase how the funding will be used to support the formalisation of new civic agreements and bolster existing mechanisms for regional civic partnership working.

Guidance

14. Applicants are encouraged to work with other universities and colleges in the region to develop a shared vision for regional civic partnership working across the tertiary education sector and beyond.
15. HEFCW acknowledges that institutions are best placed to identify the most effective methods for civic engagement and to define what success would look like in their respective regions.
16. Applicants should describe the process by which the partnerships intend to gather intelligence of regional needs, including details of why the approach has been adopted in that particular locality. They should outline how they intend to harness the insights, expertise and capacity of all partners to maximise the use of available resources to address these challenges.
17. Partnerships may wish to focus on one issue in particular (e.g. health or skills), or on a wider range of civic activities, depending on regional need, institutional capacity and expertise. It is expected that the partnerships will broaden the scope of their activities as the work becomes embedded.
18. Applicants are encouraged to take account of existing outreach initiatives, such as [Reaching Wider Partnerships](#) and consider how the civic engagement partnerships could learn from and add value to these partnerships.
19. Applicants may also wish to consider how the regional civic partnerships can support the delivery of existing plans for regional development e.g. the Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) developed by [Corporate Joint Committees \(CJCs\)](#). Other statutory partnerships such as Public Service Boards should also be considered.

Pan-Wales activity

20. HEFCW will continue to provide funding to Universities Wales to support pan-Wales activity. It is anticipated that this will include fostering opportunities for networking between the regional partnerships.
21. Universities Wales will host event(s) to showcase the ways in which tertiary education is making a contribution to its region, and undertake other political and communications activity.

Awarding the funding

22. Proposals must be co-developed and signed by all higher and further education partner institutions involved. The lead university must demonstrate sufficient capacity to deliver the proposal effectively. Proposals must also demonstrate that all partners have capacity to engage effectively.

23. In instances where formal civic agreements between universities and colleges are already in place, funding can be used to enhance existing approaches and/ or to support civic partnership work through these existing mechanisms. Proposals must demonstrate added value.
24. HEFCW will undertake strategic conversations with applicants following submission of the expressions of interest to provide feedback and ensure that proposals are sufficiently ambitious and realistic.

Monitoring

25. Lead institutions will be asked to submit a case study outlining the approach taken towards regional civic partnership working **by Friday 22 March 2025**. A case study template is provided at **Annex B**.

Timetable

26. A timeline is provided below.

25 July 2024	Deadline to submit Expressions of Interest
1 August 2024	Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research becomes operational
September 2024	Funding awarded to lead university
November 2024	Event to showcase how the funding will be used to support the formalisation of regional civic partnership working between HE and FE.
22 March 2025	Submission of case study demonstrating the value added by the formalisation of Regional Civic Engagement Partnership working.

Further information / responses to

27. Please read the guidance notes carefully as you complete the form. An application form is provided at **Annex A**.
28. Applications should be submitted via email to Meg Hughes (meg.hughes@hefcw.ac.uk) **by 18.00 on Friday 25 July 2024**.
29. For further information, contact Meg Hughes (029 2085 9716; meg.hughes@hefcw.ac.uk (or meg.hughes@medr.cymru from 1 August 2024).

30. Applications may be submitted in Welsh, and any application submitted in Welsh will be treated no less favourably than an application submitted in English.
31. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) will cease operating after 31 July 2024. HEFCW's duties, responsibilities and staff will transfer to Medr, the [Commission for Tertiary Education and Research](#), from 1 August 2024. Any circulars that require attention after 1 August 2024 will be available on the Commission's website from August.
32. If you require access to a publication that isn't readily available in August, please email publications@medr.cymru.

Assessing the impact of our policies

33. We have carried out an impact assessment screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We also considered the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales and potential impacts towards the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including our Well-Being Objectives. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about impact assessments.