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hefcw

Research Wales Innovation Fund Strategy 2020/21 – 2022/23

Institution:	Aberystwyth University (AU)
RWIF strategy lead:	Professor Colin McInnes
Email:	cjm@aber.ac.uk
Telephone :	07507505703

Section A: Overview

1. Strategic ambitions

Aberystwyth University's (AU) Strategic Plan identifies its role in contributing to the social and economic development in Wales and beyond by applying its knowledge to local and global challenges; it is a research-led University; and a key strategic KPI for AU is to increase research income, diversifying and expanding our grant capture activities and expanding innovation. Its new Research and Innovation Strategy identifies collaboration with partners as a key principle in driving research, which in turn contributes to the society we live. AU also has a special responsibility to the Welsh language and culture, and our innovation and knowledge exchange (KE) activities under the RWIF will reflect this.

Aberystwyth is located in a rural environment with a low population density. Major employers include the public sector, tourism and agriculture. It is SME-centric without any anchor companies; it is one of the economically poorest regions of northern Europe; and Ceredigion businesses report major skills shortages, especially in design and technology and digital industries.

For AU, innovation includes both industry and the cultural/creative sector. Our vision continues to commit AU to exploring new forms of dialogue and engagement in Wales and globally.

The RWIF will provide AU with the opportunity to consolidate and rebrand its innovation and KE activities into a cohesive framework for increased emphasis and profile, providing the foundations for a step-change in activity. At the heart of this is the aim of establishing a new 'Dialogue Centre', both a physical space and an energising concept. Working with research, business, civil society and the wider public, the Centre will act as our civic connection for KE, facilitating conversations which are cooperative, iterative, which persist over time and are firmly located in the communities. Taking advantage of the 'digital shift' under COVID, the Dialogue Centre will also facilitate greater engagement with communities outside of Aberystwyth. As a first stage of bringing together enterprising activities and people, in addition to centralising a base for the RWIF strategy implementation, we will

establish a new Enterprise Hub on the Aberystwyth Science Park in close proximity to the KE professional services teams. This will create and monitor momentum around enterprise and entrepreneurship, with support programmes eventually becoming a part of the Dialogue Centre, the Enterprise & Innovation Zone in the Old College.

2. Capacity Grant

Analysis conducted during 2019-20 identified the need to invest in capacity in five key areas:

1. Business development;
2. Communications;
3. Civic engagement;
4. Due diligence and integrity; and
5. Support for research grant applications.

The capacity grant will be used to fund new posts in these areas. To counter recruitment challenges we will adopt a programme-based change management approach, recruiting for RWIF roles that will work across all programmes and deliver change in all five areas with explicit focus on innovation and KE and using additional existing support from the Department of Research, Business and Innovation (RB&I). These posts will also enable additional support for start-ups. We expect the leadership of the Dialogue Centre to be one of the responsibilities of the newly appointed Director of RB&I, who will work closely with the PVC (R).

We recognise that increasing our innovation and KE activities will create potential risks. We will therefore use the programme based RWIF roles to expand on our current provision, boosting the Ethics and Integrity support. In addition, the value of administrative support for grant applications is clear but currently stretched. We will use the capacity grant to further invest in this area.

The RWIF will be used to help develop existing research & innovation engagement strengths to develop the vehicles of engagement, mapped using the new Customer Relationship Management software, and provide the foundations for future KE partnership channels, such as:

VetHub1 (https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/ibers/research-and-enterprise/research/vethub1/) is nearing the completion of the build phase and, to maximise its impact, we will use the ICDF to fund the post of Director, not least to enable VetHub1 to play a major role in Wales post-COVID. Once fully operational, VetHub1's commercial activities should be sufficient to pay for this post.

The National Spectrum Centre (www.aber.ac.uk/nsc) is a joint venture with industrial partners and has received limited seed funding to refurbish an existing building and to develop a business plan. We will use RWIF to appoint a Director to start in early 2022 and manage the Centre.

New software will be procured in 2021 to manage effectively research grants, commercial and other business relations, and public engagement activities. We estimate that this will be fully integrated into our operations during 2023.

Section B: Specific content

3. Commercialisation / income generating activity

The commercialisation of our research through the RWIF will be explicitly geared towards social and economic benefit in Mid Wales in particular, but also more broadly in Wales and internationally; and to increasing research grant capture.

We will combine our existing enterprise activities into a new Enterprise Hub, which will act as the as the vehicle to promote and scale-up our commercialisation activities. This will involve: building on existing relationships (e.g. with Germinal, Senova, Waitrose and QinetiQ) and reconnecting with companies who have a history of engagement with AU; sector-specific initiatives and regional engagement with SMEs. We will also use the Dialogue Centre as a means of bringing different communities together to identify social and economic needs, to explore how these might be addressed, and to stimulate activities to resolve those needs. A key element of our activity will be working closely with regional and national authorities, especially with Ceredigion and Powys County Councils (including through the Mid Wales Growth Deal) in the areas of:

(i) *Industrial Innovation Research*, focussing on
- Sustainable food production and processing,
- Industrial bio-technology and the bio-economy,
- AI/Digital Agritech and Earth Observation
- One Health with a rural dimension, and
- Radio Spectrum

(ii) *Cultural/Creative Innovation*. Recognising both the role this plays in the Welsh economy and UK more generally, we will use the RWIF to further develop collaborations with other partners in this sector, including the planned Wales Trusted Digital Repository (new initiative) with the National Library of Wales (https://www.library.wales/) and the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (https://rcahmw.gov.uk/).

(iii) *Rural Entrepreneurship*. RWIF will be used to establish a Rural Resilience and Innovation Network aimed at developing innovative strategies and practical solutions for rural start-ups and businesses.

In addition to these commercialisation activities, we will use the RWIF to increase our support for grant applications, largely building on existing provision (such as toolkits, briefing sessions and professional support), but also to create new opportunities for example in horizon scanning.

AU's approach will be to focus the RWIF on initiatives in four broad areas:

(i)   Engagement

Explicitly aligning with the KE Concordat (https://www.keconcordat.ac.uk/) principle of Engagement, the RWIF provides AU with the means to move from opportunistic engagements to a more structured whole-University approach, raising awareness of opportunities both internally within AU and with potential partners. The focus will be on potential partners in Wales, but also those outside Wales who may be able to invest in Wales but especially Mid Wales.

This initiative includes:

- developing a clear external presence route (including business forum) for engagement between large research projects and businesses;
- establishing sector-specific networks appropriate to the needs of Wales and especially Mid Wales. Of particular interest are the agri-tech and creative arts sectors, but networks will not be limited to these;
- developing key account management with strategic partners;
- Increasing support and engagement with consultancy and contract research activities by establishing streamlined pricing structures and processes;
- Marketing campaigns to target prospective companies.
- Embracing the collaborative opportunities offered by the Wales Innovation Network (WIN) to partner with other Welsh HEIs and build relationships with private, public and third sector bodies and increase R&I income capture and improve knowledge exchange.

(ii)   Enabling

This initiative addresses the need to support commercialisation activities, and is informed by the Growing Mid Wales Strategic Economic Plan & Growth Deal Roadmap, May 2020 https://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/your-council/partnerships/growing-mid-wales/ and targeted towards the Mid Wales Growth Deal and other place-based projects. It will be used to support both specific initiatives and more general provision. The key example of the former is the National Spectrum Centre. The Economic Impact Assessment for this Centre has been funded by the Welsh Government and the RWIF will be used to provide business development support. More general provision includes developing expertise centrally to better support KE activities, including an enhanced 'toolkit' to cover intellectual property, commercialisation and business engagement; and a University-wide CRM to collate, analyse and target existing contacts in building new industry and stakeholder relationships.

(iii)   Participation

We will use RWIF to increase AU's participation in key areas where partners congregate and we have research & innovation engagement strength. This includes participation in events (such as local and national business networks for example the Mid Wales Manufacturing Group https://www.mwmg.org/) and online platforms (e.g. CIEL: Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock https://www.cielivestock.co.uk/). We will focus on increasing commercialization opportunities and raising the profile AU research and patented technologies by

engaging with on-line platforms to promote and attract new licensing opportunities (e.g. IN-PART https://in-part.com/).

(iv)   Support

Building on activities from HEFCW 'Strengthening the Research Base' we will introduce a substantial 'Commercialisation and KE Fund' to support knowledge exchange, technology transfer and commercialisation of research. We will invest in improved training and mentorship for business start-ups and for research grant applicants, especially Early Career Researchers, and expand the use of 'sandpits' to develop research grant initiatives, specifically directed at collaborative funding with non-HE partners. We will increase our professional support for grant applications, and we will provide funded leave to prepare major grant applications (such as RC Centres, research infrastructure, DTPs).

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

Due to the uncertainty of the COVID crisis, we have had difficulty attributing hard targets to the following KPIs, specifically as we as we are unable to establish firm baselines from which to develop future projections.

Key Performance Indicators:

1.   Develop the Dialogue Centre – Stage One. Develop the concept and the approaches to be used, establish the capacity to support activities, and begin strategic goal setting.

2.   Develop the Dialogue Centre – Stage Two. Expand and relocate to major new facilities in the Old College (c.2023).

3.   Actively engage and partner with the regional government including: Ceredigion, Powys and the Growing Mid Wales Partnership, supporting the '*Vision for Mid Wales'*, the ESF Priority 5 programme, the Mid Wales Growth Deal and regional working groups in e.g. enterprise support, employability and skills.

4.   Secure a minimum £20M in capital investment from the Mid Wales Growth Deal linked to initiatives in AU's strategic priority areas of Industrial Innovation Research.

5.   Establish an identifiable pipeline of activity in Industrial Innovation Research, including establishing a National Spectrum Centre in Mid Wales.

6.   Establish the Wales Trusted Digital Repository (WTDR) initiative with regional partners and secure £70M+ investment for the region.

7.   Build on the Memorandum of Understanding with the National Library of Wales, and collaborations with other stakeholders e.g. Royal Commission

for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, with a view to establishing a cultural Research & Innovation Hub.

8. Establish a Rural Resilience and Innovation Network to develop a strategy for supporting rural start-ups and businesses.

9. Develop a toolkit and deliver academic staff training in KE activities including IP, commercialisation, and business engagement.

10. Develop 4 formal strategic partnerships with business and industry over the next three years (from a current baseline of zero).

11. Increase the number and value of applications to UKRI, focussing on Innovate UK (from an Innovate UK baseline of 6 applications in 2019/20)

12. Increase the number and value of applications to Innovation funding e.g. Translation funding programmes

13. Increase consultancy income by 15% (using 2019/20 HEBCi data, published March 2021 as a baseline).

14. Increase in Contract Research income by 15% (using 2019/20 HEBCi data, published March 2021 as a baseline.

15. Develop and implement a university wide CRM system to capture, monitor and develop strategies for external engagement across AU

16. Introduce strategies, policies and procedures directed towards fulfilling the requirements of the KE Concordat Principles of Engagement and Policies and Processes.

17. Engage with WIN to:
   - support the delivery of the Network's aim of securing an additional £30m to Welsh institutions over an initial three-year period.
   - report data on bids developed

3.2 How will your strategic approach in this area align with HEFCW's Research and Innovation: the Vision for Wales? Select the pillars supported:

☑ Excellence
☑ Place
☑ Innovation
☑ Collaboration

3.3 How do your strategic ambitions for commercialisation and income generating activity support the Vision's goals, milestones and ambitions?

Our approach to, and our strategic ambitions for commercialisation using RWIF strongly reflect HEFCW's *Vision for Wales* and its four pillars:

- Excellence: by focusing on our areas of existing strengths, including food technology, biotechnology and the bio-economy and also theatre, film and television studies, as well as areas of potential strength such as veterinary science; and by increasing support for grant applications.
- Place: through a strong awareness of the needs and potential of Mid Wales in particular and Wales more generally, including radio spectrum, rural economy and the Mid Wales Growth Deal.
- Innovation: through an emphasis upon the NSC and radio spectrum, the Aberystwyth Innovation and Enterprise Campus (AberInnovation, https://aberinnovation.com/) and agri-/bio-technology and veterinary science and One Health.
- Collaboration; through the establishment of the Dialogue Centre as a vehicle to promote and facilitate commercialisation across and between sectors, and through closer relationships with existing partners (such as the National Library of Wales).

In the short term, our goals are to embed recent investments linked to our research & innovation engagement strengths (e.g., AberInnovation, VetHub1), work on new initiatives (NSC, Dialogue Centre, Enterprise Hub) and increase support for commercialisation, in order to position ourselves in a sustainable manner for greater commercialisation of our research. In the medium term (i.e., beyond the scope of the RWIF), milestones are to create a thriving culture of research excellence, innovation and knowledge exchange; build on the reputation of AberInnovation and the NSC to establish a science park; and establish effective horizon scanning, with the long term ambition of embedding AU as the centre for hi-tech research and commercialisation in Mid Wales.

4. New business growth and skills support

Our primary aim will be the development of continued professional development (CPD) packages. These will:

1. address the current skills deficit in (Mid-) Wales;
2. respond to the anticipated employment problems following the COVID pandemic.
3. provide support for the Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme.

During the COVID lockdown, and using Zoom for bilingual provision, we have developed 75 new innovative distance learning modules and short courses to enable existing and new learners to develop new skills. This format has attracted many new learners and has particularly attracted learners with disabilities who might have had difficulty accessing more traditionally delivered learning. This acts in lieu of a proof of concept for developing online CPD provision using the RWIF. In particular, the move to a blend of online and face-to-face teaching for session

2020/21 provides us with a reservoir of material and expertise which may be suitable for CPD. Building on the success of ESF funded CPD projects (e.g. Welsh Bioinnovation and Advanced Media Production), we will develop and implement a coordinated CPD strategy. Not least, this will support academics in developing new CPD provision but also the commercialization of CPD using insights gained from our membership of the Mid Wales Regional Learning & Skills Partnership project and our preliminary research on micro-credentials demand for the region. This will directly address social and economic needs in (Mid-)Wales, as well as linking with the Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme and the Youth Engagement program at Old College to provide important skills development and start-up potential for the regions young people.

In addition to CPD, AU has recently begun to invest – with other funding partners – in a series of major new or re-purposed facilities designed to grow new business, with a particular emphasis on the needs of (Mid-)Wales. The RWIF provides us with the opportunity to fund activities using these facilities. In particular:

1. *Aberystwyth Innovation and Enterprise Campus (AberInnovation* https://aberinnovation.com/). This is a £40.5m capital project funded by AU, UKRI and ERDF investment, which is nearing completion of construction. The facilities provide state of the art capabilities to promote innovation specifically in the agri- and bio-tech sectors for the university knowledge base. We will use RWIF to increase the space at AberInnovation for start-ups by refurbishing existing space on the Gogerddan Campus, where AberInnovation is located. We have also piloted (unfunded) an investor readiness programme for start-ups and spin-offs –'BioAccelerate' - in order to test the market need in Mid Wales for entrepreneurship training specifically in the areas of stakeholder management, value proposition development and pitching of business concepts which are not covered in detail in the general business support offered by the Welsh Government. RWIF will be used to roll this out to the staff and students at AU and entrepreneurs in the local community

2. *National Spectrum Centre (NSC,* www.aber.ac.uk/nsc*).* This is a collaborative venture to create an ecosystem between government, industry and academia to identify, develop and demonstrate the enabling technologies necessary to maximise the value of the electromagnetic spectrum to 'Digital Britain'. It will provide a platform to support industry/academia collaborations and will provide expertise needed to conduct research on spectrum dependent systems. The NSC and AU will also provide training and education to up-skill industry and to provide the next generation of spectrum engineers. We will use the RWIF to support skills development through the NSC with targeted studentships.

3. *VetHub1* (https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/ibers/research-and-enterprise/research/vethub1/)*.* This is a major new venture into veterinary research by AU, with support from WEFO (ERDF funding). By providing mid-Wales' only (business accessible) high-level containment laboratory facilities (CL2 and CL3) for working with pathogenic micro-organisms, VetHub1 is an EU-backed Innovation Cluster that will engage with SMEs,

HEIs and multi-national companies in developing research/commercial activities targeting diseases of zoonotic and animal health importance to Wales.

Opening in Autumn 2020, VetHub1 will additionally work with government (Chief Veterinary Office) and other providers (e.g. Wales Veterinary Science Centre) to complement Veterinary support services throughout Wales and to enhance National capabilities/contingencies (in pathogen detection). We also will support our users/partners in the development of start-up and spin-out activities.

By offering veterinary services in Wales that normally are performed elsewhere (England and Scotland) AND by assisting in pathogen detection where existing facilities cannot meet demand, VetHub1 will contribute to a national resiliency network assisting veterinary practices, zoonotic outbreak control and farmers. The additional impact of VetHub1's services will also support the future development and current implementation of local and national Government strategies/policies. VetHub1 will also enable new and improved products and services to be developed in support of the animal health industry of Mid Wales. As VetHub1 services will be chargeable, economic impact will lead to regional growth and development (new jobs and income) as well as encourage further investment and innovation.

The RWIF will provide funding for scientific and technical consultancy to:

- Identify external users needing biologics (microbial and parasitological reagents) for maintaining and/or developing animal/human/zoonotic health diagnostics (e.g. Liver and blood fluke proteins, Tb Ag/lipids, etc.)
- Develop UKAS accredited certifications for pathogen detection.
- Liaise with government to coordinate national contingency strategies in pathogen detection.
- Identify external users needing anti-microbial and anthelmintic screens performed.
- Develop a business model for these services.

The aim is to identify and develop the scientific commercial potential of VetHub1 to create new start-up or spin-offs. The development of pathogen detection/screening/surveilance services would address the growing concerns related to transmission of animal health/zoonotic diseases important to Mid and West Wales, but clearly relevant to other economies across the globe.

4. *Old College.* The historic sea front building will be re-opened in 2023 with a designated Enterprise and Innovation Zone. This Zone is targeted in particular at incubators for start-ups and young entrepreneurs (with some HEFCW funding already secured). We will use the RWIF to further develop our plans on how to operationalise the Zone in an effective manner,

engaging with the Youth Entrepreneurship Programme (YEP) and with local stakeholders.

In addition, we will provide support for start-ups both through training and the provision of space. Aberystwyth already provides support for start-ups through:

- AberInnovation Offices - Fully-serviced offices and meeting rooms for innovators, start-ups and businesses in the bioscience, agri-tech and food and drink sectors.
- Student software Incubator - Co-working space for students and groups of students to develop software products/Apps with state-of-the-art computing equipment.
- Aberystwyth Arts Centre Creative Studios - A creative hub of 18 open and flexible spaces for arts businesses, artists and craft workers.

The Old College development also includes an Incubation - Office and workshop spaces for start-ups of the University in the creative sectors, publishing, digital apps, Websites and services, music and film.

With RWIF funding we will significantly enhance the provision of start-up, scale-up and spin-out spaces by developing the entire top floor of the Milford Building . Located at Gogerddan, above the NSC and adjacent to AberInnovation and the site of the proposed Innovation Park (part of AU's Mid Wales Growth Deal proposal), we believe this will provide substantial capacity to develop new jobs and businesses. In 2021 we will open the northern half of the floor, completing the renovation during the period of the RWIF.

We will also undertake the following new initiatives:
5. Most significantly, we will establish an Enterprise Hub (see above), which will act as a coordinating mechanism for the range of existing and planned business support activities. A key element of this will be the YEP.
6. Consolidate existing AU enterprise activities, including ENACTUS (a student social enterprise society currently being established); Big Ideas Wales Mentoring (which we co-ordinate with our partner Antur Teifi) and activities in our Business school, RB&I and AberInnovation.
7. Provide training for research staff and students (including PGRs and post-doctoral researchers) on starting new businesses.
8. Establish a means of brokering relationships to enable start-ups and spin-offs to grow.
9. Support AU applicants to Innovate UK I-CURe or similar programmes, providing funding for salary costs; and establish a programme of paid leave for staff to develop spin-out opportunities.
10. Develop opportunities for commercialisation of non-STEM research through platforms for entrepreneurship, commercialisation and transformation e.g., by joining the ASPECT Network (https://aspect.ac.uk/).
11. Building on established initiatives such as the Student Software Incubator to develop a framework of support for App development, including strategies for development and distribution.

12. Explore possible relationships with FE Colleges in Ceredigion and Powys to develop a skills pipeline, building on the existing relationship with Coleg Cambria.

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

Key Performance Indicators:

1. Develop a central strategy, policy and procedures for CPD provision across AU.

2. Expand and diversify the current CPD provision and target new sectors. Increase Learner Days by 10% per annum (using 2019/20 HEBCi data, published March 2021 as a baseline).

3. Aberystwyth Innovation & Enterprise Campus/AberInnovation: To fund annually two bio-Accelerator programmes for start-ups/spin-outs.

4. National Spectrum Centre: fund 3 fees-only awards for MSc programme students.

5. VetHub: Establish a strategy and procedures to target, cost and deliver commercial screening.

6. Old College: Produce an operational plan for the Enterprise and Innovation Zone.

7. Establish an Enterprise Hub within the Dialogue Centre and develop a cohesive strategy and coordinated processes for enterprise support for students, graduates, staff and businesses.

8. Engage with local/regional Business Networks and host/establish new networks e.g., Mid Wales Enterprise Network, growing from a starting point of 4 meetings per annum.

9. Establish an Alumni Entrepreneur Group (create network/host events/mentoring) / working with Development and Alumni Relations Office.

10. Introduce Academic Enterprise Champions (ACE) to champion entrepreneurship in Faculties/Departments. Meet YES scheme graduate start-up target of 20 in 2021 and achieve targets of 22 (in 2022) and 24 (in 2023).

11. Support entrepreneurial staff and post-graduate/doctoral students to develop start-up/spin out opportunities by introducing annual awards for 6 months' salary funding for:
    i. Postgraduate/doctoral students at the end of their studies
    ii. 'Innovation Leave' awards for staff.

12. Develop and implement a Spin Out Policy.

13. Establish 3 new Spinouts based on University IP, over 3 years.

14. Establish new purpose fitted offices and workshop spaces for start-ups and spinouts on AU's Gogerddan Campus.

15. Develop initiatives to engage with and support commercialisation of non-STEM research.

16. Develop a strategy, policy and processes for App development and distribution including support and mentoring.

17. Facilitate interactions with FE Colleges in the region to develop a skills map and pipeline.

4.2 How will your strategic approach in this area align with HEFCW's [Research and Innovation: the Vision for Wales](#)? Select the pillars supported:

☑ Excellence
☑ Place
☑ Innovation
☑ Collaboration

4.3 How do your strategic ambitions for new business growth and skills support the Vision's goals, milestones and ambitions?

Our goal during the three-year period of the RWIF is to establish a sustainable model of skills provision and business development. Our medium-term milestone is to establish the Dialogue Centre as a key skills provider for Mid Wales, with outreach beyond the area and including strong relationships with FE colleges, and with the Enterprise Hub as a recognised centre for excellence in developing new businesses. Our long term ambition is to significantly increase the number of industrial collaborations by developing AberInnovation, NSC, VetHub and the Wales Trusted Digital Repository in particular as recognised centres of international excellence, and AU as a national CPD provider with an international footprint.

Our approach is heavily informed by a sense of place and the needs of Mid Wales in particular, and Wales more generally in terms of skills development and business opportunities. For example, in Mid Wales the largely rural nature of the region and the presence of the co-location of the National Library of Wales and Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments Wales on the AU Penglais site, and nationally through the opportunities presented by existing radio spectrum facilities in Wales. It builds on existing and developing areas of research excellence, especially in agri-/bio-tech, veterinary science and media production, and on collaborations with a range of partners, while looking at the potential to develop new relationships with FE Colleges and through the Enterprise Hub. And

its focus is on innovation through providing the capacity and means to build and develop new businesses.

5. Civic Mission and Public Engagement

AU's vision, as expressed in its Strategic Plan https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/strategicplan/, is to 'contribute to society in Wales and the wider world by applying our knowledge to local and global challenges'. We are particularly aware of our responsibilities to the Welsh language and culture, and the challenges to civic mission and public engagement in a rural area of low population density. This informs our RWIF strategy but does not limit it. AU is also part of the newly formed Civic Mission Network led by Universities Wales on which Aberystwyth is represented by the academic lead of 'The World we Want' program, which connects our capabilities and will support a more coherent approach to these activities across Wales and facilitate the sharing of best practice.

We will use the RWIF, to develop this vision in three ways with a specific focus on social development, though recognizing the economic benefits which will also accrue (e.g. through tourism):

- Increased public engagement activities, including Welsh medium activities and potentially in collaboration with Bangor University to cover Mid and North Wales;
- Youth engagement; and
- Digital Festival.

An underpinning theme for these will be 'The World We Want', an inter- and multi-disciplinary approach to exploring life after COVID, which will explicitly engage with communities outside the University and take advantage of the ethos of the Dialogue Centre and Enterprise and Innovation Zone as a 'safe space' for interactive work. In addition, the CPD activities outlined in section 4 will have a strong civic mission dimension, addressing the theme of 'Social Enterprise and Innovation'.

(i) Public Engagement. The Dialogue Centre builds on our long and strong tradition of civic mission. For example, Lifelong Learning at AU has just celebrated its centenary and was the first extra mural department in Wales and only the second in the UK. RWIF will allow us, through the Dialogue Centre, to address – directly or indirectly – all four Civic Mission themes.

  a. <u>Public lectures</u>. AU has a long history of public lectures where researchers engage with the community. Lectures have been delivered by both AU staff and visitors, including the prestigious Gregynog

Lecture series, which has been in abeyance for a number of years. We will use the RWIF to revitalize the Gregynog Lecture programme, focusing on increasing diversity, and to develop livestreaming by using interactive technologies thus allowing community engagement across Wales.

    b.   <u>Festival of Research</u>. This annual event will consist of a wide range of activities, from formal lectures through workshops to competitions and online discussion boards, centered around a specific theme (such as COP26 https://www.ukcop26.org/, Artificial Intelligence etc), allowing university researchers to engage with community groups (including schools) across Wales but with a specific focus on Mid Wales.

    c.   <u>Online events.</u> COVID19 has demonstrated the potential to hold events online, including cultural/creative events. For AU, this provides us with the opportunity for a much greater engagement with communities in Wales: for events ranging from live openings of exhibitions (a model used successfully by the British Museum) to performances (a model used successfully by the Royal Shakespeare Company), to moderated discussions and debates on contemporary topics. An important innovation is that developments in software now allow for simultaneous translation of such events.

(ii) Youth Engagement. The Old College redevelopment plans include dedicated space for young people – the 'Youth Engagement Zone' - as part of the 'World of Knowledge' theme https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/oldcollege/future-plans/imagesandplans/. This space is intended to provide skills development and educational opportunities. Our young people live in one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged regions in the UK and EU, with limited access to goods and services and high levels of in-work poverty due to low wages. School children live across a wide area and the availability of youth facilities is often patchy or non-existent. Access to learning activities outside the classroom is limited and rural isolation and social exclusion are major risks. Ceredigion businesses report major skills shortages, especially in design and technology and digital industries. Statutory service providers, youth groups and third sector groups across the County report a serious lack of suitable neutral space for activities and meetings with young people in Aberystwyth town centre. Our ambition is to create a centre for learning, culture and enterprise for young people in the iconic Old College, providing significant and sustainable opportunities to catalyse new ways of working with young people, youth groups and the County Council. We will use RWIF to develop this concept prior to its re-opening in 2023. This directly addresses the themes of 'Active Citizenship' and 'Leading Place' and indirectly 'Links with Schools'.

(iii) Digital Festival. The Old College redevelopment is partnered with the

Hay Festival to increase the festival's footprint in Wales. We will use the RWIF to develop a digital dimension to this relationship, enabling us to engage with communities across Wales and beyond. This addresses the themes of 'Active Citizenship', 'Leading Place' and 'Links with Schools' through an explicit focus of some activities on working with schools.

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

Key Performance Indicators:

1. Establish state-of-the-art interactive audio/video infrastructure across the university to take advantage of the digital shift (post COVID), introducing 2/3 new suites per year.

2. Host online public lectures via the new infrastructure, 3 per annum.

3. Host an annual, week-long Festival of Research starting in 2021.

4. Establish 'The World We Want' programme.

5. Develop an operational concept for youth engagement in Old College.

6. Work with the Hay Festival to develop digital content for wider access (including schools).

7. Engage with Wales Civic Mission Network to enable sharing of good practice with other Welsh HEIs and explore more dynamic ways of engagement.

5.2 How will your strategic approach in this area align with HEFCW's [Research and Innovation: the Vision for Wales](#)? Select the pillars supported:

☑ Excellence
☑ Place
☑ Innovation
☑ Collaboration

5.3 How do your strategic ambitions for civic mission and public engagement support the Vision's goals, milestones and ambitions?

Our goal in the period of the RWIF is to establish a sustainable model for civic mission and public engagement, which takes advantage of the digital shift to speak not only to local but regional and national communities. This includes establishing a new digital infrastructure to enable online interactive public events, the establishment of the Dialogue Centre as a coordinating hub, establishing 'The

World We Want' programme, and an operational model for the Youth Zone in the Old College. Our medium-term milestones is to develop this through the renewed Old College, enabling our long term ambition for the Old College to be an internationally recognised centre for public engagement addressing our civic mission targets.

This trajectory builds on our established excellence in public engagement at the local and regional level, with a strong sense of place (not least through our commitments to the Welsh language and to promoting Welsh culture). The digital shift allows us to be innovative in our approach and we expect to be agile and responsive to new opportunities and developments. Through our developing relationship with local stakeholders (including youth groups), national events (especially the Hay Festival), and potential links with Bangor University, we will establish a pattern of long term collaboration.

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

Our RWIF strategy has been developed to align with *A Vision for Growing Mid Wales: Strategic Economic Plan and Growth Deal Roadmap* (https://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/media/7075/vision-for-growing-mid-wales_final.pdf May 2020) and informed by WG's *Prosperity for All* and the UK's *Industrial Strategy*. Prosperity for All: Economic Action Plan. The levelling up agenda is based on the principle that places matter and that all regions should be empowered to develop inclusive, fair and sustainable growth to address inequalities and the existing and new challenges facing Wales. AU is working closely with its partners in Mid Wales on the development of the Growth Deal to address these challenges. In particular Mid Wales faces a predicted cycle of economic decline of 3.45% between 2018 – 2040 against a predicted growth of 7.4% in the UK economy due to poor GDP and GVA (its GVA being 82% of Welsh average and 65% of UK average), a declining and ageing population, employment decline, market failure, low pay and rural poverty. The Mid Wales Partnership https://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/your-council/partnerships/growing-mid-wales/ aims to build on existing strengths in high value manufacturing, agriculture and food, defence and security and tourism and to exploit its assets in these sectors to promote low-carbon growth and develop good quality jobs.

Our RWIF strategy fully supports that agenda and has been developed to tackle regional inequality through driving sustainable growth through developing modern and connected infrastructure and equipping people with the skills they need for a changing world. The new posts will increase capacity for a range of engagements and will support the elements within the Economic Contracts outlined in *Prosperity for All* and its five Calls to Action for decarbonisation, innovation, developing exports and trade, high quality employment with skills development and fair work and research and development. Other clusters of initiatives will be developed with businesses to include Artificial Intelligence and Agriculture. The proposed National Spectrum Centre will contribute to developing infrastructure and skills within the

high asset defence and security sector (already providing employment in Aberporth, Brecon, and Sennybridge) and promote low-carbon engineering. AberInnovation and VetHub 1 address innovation and market failure within agriculture and the food industry (employing about 14,000 people in Mid Wales), which faces uncertainty surrounding BREXIT and is in dire need of innovation and investment in skills development. The Dialogue Centre will support a range of relationships with business, public and third sector organisations while also contributing to the tourism offering (tourism accounting for 23,000 people in Mid Wales). It will underpin AU's civic mission and provide opportunity and encouragement for people to address the Grand Challenges identified within the UK's *Industrial Strategy* of AI and data, an ageing society, the need for clean growth and the future of mobility.

Our RWIF strategy has also been developed in conjunction with our 2019-2021 YES Funding Programme. The YES strategy concentrates on two main areas:
- Supporting student/grad/staff start-ups
- Embedding ENTRECOMP skills into curricula for all AU students (Entrepreneurial competencies).

The YES strategy does little to support research-based spinout businesses and little to offer CPD to businesses, which the RWIF will do. The two projects (YES and RWIF) will complement each other, sitting alongside each other in the new Enterprise Hub. The YES project also encompasses the WGs Prosperity for All: Economic Action Plan (as is detailed in AU's YES funding proposal 2019-2021). Aligning YES with RWIF in the Dialogue Centre will consolidate enterprise and entrepreneurial efforts, contributing towards a more sustainable future for this area of activity at AU.

7. Meeting the requirements of the UK Knowledge Exchange Concordat

AU sees this document as the first step in developing a new KE strategy, building on current policies and practices; and it strongly reflects the principles outlined in the KEC https://www.keconcordat.ac.uk/:

1. *Mission:* Our Strategic Plan commits us to contributing to social and economic development in Wales and beyond by applying our knowledge to local and global challenges; and the vision expressed in this document commits AU to exploring new forms of dialogue and engagement in Wales and globally.
2. *Policies and Processes:* Commitments include developing a Spin Out/IP exploitation policy; supporting and engaging with consultancy and contract research by establishing streamlined pricing structures and processes; improved CRM; and developing a clear approach for CPD.
3. *Engagement:* At the heart of this document is a transformation in our engagement practices and opportunities through the development of the Dialogue Centre. We will work to establish clear engagement routes for external collaborators and stakeholders (website, ease of enquiry and set service level standards etc); a strategy for strategic engagement with key

collaborators; and clear contractual frameworks for building and managing strategic partnerships.

4. *Working Effectively*: We will establish an Ethics and Integrity Unit, developing our capacity to ensure innovation and KE activities are fair, ethical and transparent.
5. *Capacity Building:* The RWIF will allow us to significantly develop existing provision in terms of new posts to support KE and innovation, improved skills development, and the development of CPD both as commercial packages and as part of the Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme
6. *Recognition and Rewards:* KE is included in the newly revised procedures for academic promotion (through a section on 'leadership'), and we have developed the Aberystwyth University Award for Exceptional Research Impact which consists of two prizes presented at graduation.
7. *Continuous Improvement:* We will use the skills development initiatives to share best practice internally; and will use questionnaires with partners to provide feedback to assist in improving our practices and procedures.
8. *Evaluating Success:* We recognise that RWIF and the KEC together represent a starting point in developing a shift in KE provision. We will therefore institute regular monitoring of KE performance against KPIs, including both qualitative and quantitative indicators, reporting to the University Research Committee (which will be renamed 'Research and Innovation Committee') and Strategic Executive.

8. Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015

Our vision for the RWIF supports the goals of the WBFG Act by promoting:

- A prosperous Wales, through the emphasis upon innovation, skills development and the increased use of online technologies reducing carbon emissions through travel;
- A resilient Wales, through addressing social and economic needs (especially of Mid Wales) through increased youth engagement, skills development, start-ups and commercialisation;
- A more equal Wales, through skills development, CPD and youth engagement
- A healthier Wales through work in future foods, veterinary research, and public engagement in cultural/creative activities promoting mental well-being;
- A Wales of cohesive communities by using online platforms to improve connections;
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language through increased access to cultural and creative events, through a commitment to bilingual provision wherever possible, and through the appointment of staff with proficiency in the Welsh language;
- A globally responsible Wales through the establishment of an Ethics and Integrity Unit, and through the use of online technologies to create more sustainable working practices.

It is informed by the five ways of working:

1. It is **long term** through embedding the new approach to innovation and KE in the Old College redevelopment and through the milestones and ambition articulated in the strategy;
2. It is **integrated** in embedding the 7 goals in our vision;
3. It **involves** the business community and the public in a variety of new initiatives;
4. Through the Dialogue Centre, it facilitates **collaborative** relationships with the business sector and the public;
5. And it **prevents** a worsening of social and economic conditions, especially post-COVID, through skills development, opportunities and through public engagement.

9. Impact on Welsh Language

AU has a historic and embedded commitment to the Welsh language, and RWIF investment will help us to address primarily two of the three themes of Cymraeg 2050. First, it will allow us to promote the use of Welsh in a number of ways, including:

- Increased Welsh-medium CPD provision
- Increased public engagement either through the medium of Welsh or with provision in Welsh;
- Increased youth engagement through the medium of Welsh;
- Opportunities to use the Festival of Research and the Digital Festival to promote the Welsh language and provide Welsh medium events.

This will increase the social use of Welsh, both formal and informal, which is a key aim of the Cymraeg 2050 Action Plan.

Second, it will create favourable conditions for the use of Welsh by:

- Developing the economic infrastructure of Mid Wales, supporting the socioeconomic infrastructure of Welsh-speaking communities;
- Integrating Welsh into contemporary culture, through its use in creative/cultural events and support for creative/cultural innovation in Welsh;
- Enabling and promoting the use of Welsh in digital contexts; and
- Through headlining events such as the Festival of Research, 'The World We Want' programme, and the Digital Festival, resonating with the 'major events' theme of Cymraeg 2050.

Section D: financial assurance
10. Use of Research Wales Innovation Funding

Our RWIF 2020/21 allocation will be used in 3 broad areas:

1. *Posts:* Section 2 identifies posts in 5 areas, the majority of which will be filled during 2021, along with additional posts to develop CPD provision identified in section 4. In addition we will use RWIF for the VetHub consultancy.

2. *Programmes:* We will adopt a programme-based change management approach for all KPIs and begin investment in the following KE promotion & skills programmes: Bio-Accelerate, start-up/spin-out awards, training for staff and students in business development and commercialisation, support for the Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme, the Rural Resilience and Innovation Network, 'The World We Want', and the Festival of Research.

3. *Infrastructure:* We will use the RWIF to invest in 'digital shift' facilities, and refurbishing offices for start-ups at AberInnovation.

We estimate that 60% of RWIF funding will be on the first priority; 20% on the second; and 20% on the third. AU is not proposing a return of Professional Services to offices until November 2021 due to COVID. We are sensitive to the needs of effective induction into the University, and to potential problems of new staff starting before a return to offices. This creates a major uncertainty over when it would be best to start the posts in the first priority, and therefore expenditure on these.

In future years, our priorities will be to sustain and develop these posts and programmes, continue to invest in 'digital shift' infrastructure, invest in the NSC (including their MA programme) and WTDR, develop additional CPD content, develop ideas and operational planning for Old College (including the Youth Zone and the Enterprise and Innovation Zone), explore the possibility of working with FE Colleges on skills development programmes and launch the Digital Festival.

Section E:
Regulatory Requirements
NB: HEFCW may request further information / clarification on any of these areas

i)	Welsh Language Standards (2018)	This strategy complies with Welsh Language Standards 2018
ii)	Equality Impact Assessment	This strategy has not been Equality Impact Assessed

iii)	Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)	This strategy will contribute towards the aims of the WFG Act 2015
Signature: Vice Chancellor		
Date	05/01/2022	