

**Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD)  
ESRC Annual Report 2009**

**1. Introduction:**

The Institute was established to conduct *research* into changes affecting the population of Wales, especially in relation to changing patterns of inequality and the capacity of communities and state forms to deal with emerging problems, viewed comparatively within Wales and across other regions of the UK and the EU. It has a key role in the collection, archiving and making accessible of *data* relating to Wales and in a comparative perspective. As a partner of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) it has a strong commitment to the development of *innovative research methods*, especially those that involve mixed or multiple approaches.

Funded through the ESRC Methods Programme and HEFCW's Reconfiguration and Collaboration fund, the Institute has a demanding set of aims and objectives. A major aim is capacity building across the HE sector in Wales with a strong emphasis upon dissemination and engagement with a variety of different publics. This involves the establishment of robust cross institutional structures of collaboration supported by numerous face to face meetings. Our activities are built around four themes: Data Integration; Knowing Localities; Policy & Evaluation and Capacity Building.

*The key aims for Year One* involved (a) the establishment of working, cross institutional teams for each theme; (b) broadening the involvement of researchers from across the five WISERD partner institutions (c) the building of partnerships with research organisations beyond the higher education sector.

**2. Impact:**

*Academic Impact*

a) *Activity:* WISERD is a cross institutional multi-disciplinary institute, bringing together researchers from across five universities in Wales, identified as the St David's Day group, relating to a declaration on joint working made on 1 March 2009. WISERD has been extremely successful in operationalising this agreement, building partnerships and capacity across the five partner institutions and providing an example of how collaboration can work in practice. Indeed, at a time when newspapers frequently report that "universities are notoriously bad at cooperating with each other"<sup>1</sup> WISERD has established effective cross institutional and interdisciplinary team-working across five campuses and a number of different themes and projects.

b) *Resource:* While the Hub and the largest group of researchers are based at Cardiff University, WISERD is not Cardiff-centred and Cardiff-directed. To facilitate this WISERD holds bi-monthly meetings involving all WISERD researchers and linked academics. Meetings have been held in Shrewsbury with overnight 'All Wales' working meetings being organised in Gregynog. These meetings have become an integral part of the WISERD calendar as have the monthly meetings of the WISERD Executive group which, to date have been held at Cardiff University. From February 2009 it is planned that Executive meetings will rotate across the partner institutions.

Running in parallel with these developments, the Institute has extended its membership though the recruitment of Associate Members within each of the HEIs. WISERD has also established eight Thematic Reference Groups, each with a convener drawn from outside the core staff. These groups act as expert support for the WISERD programme and in

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<sup>1</sup> *The Independent*, 17 September 2009

turn are provided with resource and administrative support for workshops and the preparation of research grant bids (See Appendix 1).

*c) Impact:* To date WISERD has been seen as the best example of successful collaboration across the five institutions. Through its main programmes, its associate membership scheme and its innovative thematic reference groups WISERD has impacted beyond its core group to include over 50 additional academics from across the five HEI's. Serious discussions around potential research projects and grant bids have taken place and are expected to come to fruition in 2010.

It was the success of this venture that gave impetus to discussions for an all Wales Doctoral training centre based on the five universities and run in parallel to WISERD. It is most unlikely that these developments would have happened without the earlier demonstration of success and this can be seen as a major and clearly identifiable impact of WISERD's activities.

### *Social Economic Impact*

*a) Activity:* During 2009 the Director and Co-Directors of WISERD made four presentations to senior members of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), up to and including the Permanent Secretary. Meetings have also been held with the Chief Statistician; the Chief Economist and the Senior Social Research Officer. In considering the survey data needs of WAG a joint discussion group was set up with WISERD involving 20 academics. This led to a proposal for a new national survey of Wales being supported by the Cabinet of WAG.

A close working relationship has been developed with the Senior Social Research Officer, Angela Evans and collaborative papers have been developed on issues of knowledge exchange and the potential of WAG-WISERD collaboration in this area. This has built on previous discussions (developed in the *Rhind Report* on the future of the social sciences) of the need for a more productive relationship between HE and WAG, avoiding duplication of research effort, developing opportunities for jointly funded research projects and a more effective Wales-based training programme for researcher staff.

*b) Resource:* In developing these ideas it was agreed that WISERD-WAG was in a position to think through and evaluate a more complex and reflexive model of knowledge exchange. As part of this it was agreed that: (i) secondments and placements in each organisation would be important. Subsequently WAG has provided funding for a senior member of the Directorate to be based in WISERD from March 2010 for a two year period with the aim of implementing a knowledge exchange programme. Discussions are also continuing to finalise the details of a secondment of one of the Institute's staff to the Economy and Transport Division of WAG on a fixed term part time basis. (ii) WISERD will be issued a call out contract by WAG which will relate to the provision of training on research methods and techniques and issues relating to ethics and research governance, with research on children highlighted as a specific area of interest. (iii) A joint WAG/WISERD seminar/discussion series will be established. (iv) A regular series of joint meetings will be established that will involve Office of National Statistics, WAG and WISERD.

*c) Impact:* In October 2009 WISERD was launched at the Senedd building in Cardiff Bay with a speech from the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan. At the Launch, WISERD was confirmed by the First Minister as one of two National Research Centres of Wales, highlighting its impact even at such an early stage of development.

### **3. Progress against Objectives:**

### 3.1. Establishing the Work Programme

The WISERD work programme is organised around four main themes, each of them with established inter-institutional and cross disciplinary project teams.

**Data Integration Team** – the team is led jointly by Professor Gary Higgs (Co-Director, University of Glamorgan) and Scott Orford (Data Integration Co-ordinator in the WISERD Hub at Cardiff). They are supported by two full-time post- doctoral researchers based at Glamorgan and a Data Technician based in the Hub. It coordinates with the quantitative research taking place in WISERD@Swansea.

**Localities team** – the team is led by Professor Martin Jones (Co-Director, Aberystwyth University), and consists of two full time and one part time researcher based at Aberystwyth, two full time researchers based at Bangor and a further two based at Cardiff. There are three additional researchers based in Cardiff who are tasked with taking forward the innovative ethnographic programme Knowing Localities in Context (KLIC) led by Professor Amanda Coffey.

**Policy Team** – the team is currently led by a policy steering group within Cardiff and has developed strong links with the Wales Governance Centre which shares the WISERD office in Cardiff and is lead by Richard Wyn Jones. The policy team currently has two full time researchers based at Cardiff responsible for developing WISERD's policy analysis and evaluation programme across Wales,

**Training and Capacity Building Team** – the team is led by Professor Howard Davis (Co-Director, Bangor University) and supported by a full time Training and Capacity Building Co-ordinator, Claire O'Neill based in the WISERD Hub at Cardiff. The Team is supported by two research groups: *Advanced Quantitative Methods Group* – Chaired by Professor David Blackaby (Co-Director Swansea University) and an *Advanced Qualitative Methods Group* - Chaired by Professor Amanda Coffey

Additionally eight **thematic reference groups** have been established. These are convened by associate members of WISERD and tasked with developing pan-Wales discussions and advice on each of the following key themes: (i) Health, wellbeing and social care; (ii) Education and young people; (iii) Language, citizenship & identity; (iv) Employment & training; (v) Economic development & regeneration; (vi) Crime, public space & policing; (vii) Housing and transport; (viii) Environment, Tourism & leisure.

### 3.2. Develop Dissemination Strategy

WISERD has established a website with the cross institutional domain name [www.wiserd.ac.uk](http://www.wiserd.ac.uk) and a logo. The importance of dissemination has been emphasised in open meetings across the WISERD partner institutions, and in association with other organisations. In addition WISERD has developed both communications and publications strategies (Appendix 2 & 3); and established five series of working papers to take forward dissemination across the each aspect of the Institute's mission: (a) Research reports; (b) Data resources; (c) Methods briefings; (d) Policy briefings (e) WISERD working papers. We have also established *WISERD News* and a bi-annual research magazine *WISERD Research*, and continue to publish *Qualitative Researcher* (ISSN 1748-7315) which was formerly edited by Qualiti, the Cardiff Node of the ESRC NCRM.

### 3.3 Partnership Working

The Institute has developed close links with WAG and many other organisations, including other leading research centres in the UK.

A bid to the ESRC on health and economy will link WISERD with two research council funded Centre's of Excellence in Public Health – DECIPHer (Cardiff, Swansea and Bristol Universities) and the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health (Durham and Newcastle Universities)

Funding from WAG (£38k) to support our involvement in an ESRC project organised by colleagues at the Institute of Education in London and the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change (CRESC) in Manchester allowed us to carry out qualitative interviews on social participation for a sample drawn from the 1958 National Child Development Cohort Study.

We have close links with the ESRC Timescapes programme and Timescapes Director, Professor Bren Neil of Leeds University sits on our Advisory Board.

Robin Mann from WISERD@Bangor is working on a collaborative project entitled *Grandparenthood in bilingual families in Wales*, funded by the Leverhulme trust with partners from the Oxford Institute of Ageing and the University of Surrey.

Within Wales we have many links including:

Centre for Regeneration Excellence Wales (CREW) with whom we have shared aims and the possibility of utilising common office space in Merthyr and Ebbw Vale.  
The Data Unit Wales shares our interest in the area of determinants of health and wellbeing in the Heads of Valleys and we are considering how the WISERD geo-portal and the Data Unit Infobase Cymru web-interface could be complementary.  
Shelter Cymru has signed a partnership agreement with WISERD and a joint bid to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation was successful which included funding for a joint qualitative researcher post.

#### *iv. Establish and Maintain Management Structures and Systems of Working*

This is partly described in section 2. Additionally it can be noted that the three key committees (Executive, Steering Group and Advisory Board) have been established and have met as planned

#### *v. New Staff members appointed and accommodated*

Although we advertised widely soon after the receipt of the grant letter we were unable to make new appointments until January 2009, additional research staff joined the Institute in April 2009 and the three appointments in Swansea were delayed until July 2009. In the meantime two of the ethnographic posts in Cardiff became vacant; their replacements commenced work in January 2010, at which time we had a full complement of staff. We had also experienced difficulties in appointing experienced staff to the senior administrative posts. The important positions of Centre Manager and Training and Capacity Building Co-ordinator were not filled in May 2009 and September 2009 respectively. We are still looking to appoint a Director. This has affected the even development of the WISERD work programme and the degree of integration across the projects. In February 2009 a WISERD All Wales meeting was held at Gregynog and provided an induction for newly appointed WISERD staff. To follow up on this in January 2010 a two day mixed methods event and researchers meeting was held in Cardiff University and was attended by a full complement of the Institute's staff.