



Proposal for Extension Funding (2008-9)

The decline in Welsh educational research capacity has been steep and sustained over many years (Rees and Power, 2007) and the WERN initiative has existed for only a short period and with access to limited resources. Despite this, both internal and external evaluation has shown that it has had considerable impact for the modest investment made. Nevertheless there is a need for continued funding to build on the momentum that has been created, and to move the research community in Wales nearer to a position, in the longer term, of self-sustainability.

The following proposals for an extension to WERN funding are informed by :

1. An evaluation of the pilot to date including identification of positive developments, the benefits of which can be maximised by further investment.
2. Consultation with existing stakeholders including WERN bursary participants and funders.
3. The opinions of Executive members who have canvassed the views of their institution and have worked collaboratively to develop these proposals.

There is support for a continuing focus on building capacity by facilitating collaborative research activity between institutions. The strategy of the first year has been to be inclusive of all institutions, both in terms of leadership and access to funded activities, but to maintain quality by the use of expert peer review in the selection of those projects to be funded. It is proposed that this approach will continue but with a greater strategic eye to the potential of funded activities to contribute to the growth of collaborative research groupings that have expert knowledge particularly needed to inform Welsh policy and practice, and the 'critical mass' to offer the prospect of longer term sustainability. The selection of successful applications for most of the proposed initiatives will be by open competition. This is fair and appropriate and is the manner in which research monies are generally distributed; competition is also likely to increase the quality of applications submitted. However because WERN's aim is to build capacity in all institutions a case can be made for distributing some funds in a non-competitive way so as to take positive action to improve capacity in less research intensive institutions. Therefore one initiative, which will take up a small proportion of the proposed budget, will be provided for each institution.

A. Group Bursary Scheme

Group bursary activity has been effective in building research activity and has the potential to sustain further research activity if the formal proposals submitted to funding organisations are successful and awarded funding. Consultation with bursary participants and other stakeholders has indicated enthusiastic support for a continuation of the Group Bursary Scheme. Evaluation has indicated that a longer time frame is needed for this activity, therefore if a further period of funding is confirmed, WERN would hope to be able to announce details of the competition during the summer with formal applications submitted by the end of October.

There is also the need to continue to build on the collaborative momentum that some groups have created during the first phase, and provide funded opportunities for follow-up work and development. Additionally some participants have identified the need for funding to undertake small pieces of research work such as piloting instruments, interrogating data sets, conducting a scoping study, co-authoring a publication/conference paper. Therefore it has been decided to propose a two category group bursary scheme:

- **Category 1: Writing a funding proposal.** The funding available would be up to £12,000 per group, but it is expected that this funding will be matched by institutions. Applications will be invited from groups whose work should focus on strategic themes relevant to the Welsh Assembly Government research agenda. The application process will be the same as the phase I pilot. It is hoped that some of the unfunded applicants from the previous round will re-apply and benefit when revising their application from mentoring support that will be available from the regional mentor surgeries.
- **Category 2: Small project funding.** Funding available will be up to £5,000 per group but it is expected that this funding will be matched by institutions. The nature of the project will be specified by the applicant group but will be small scale substantive research activity. They should be grounded in previous work of high quality such as the projects of the TLRP, and seek to apply this knowledge in a Welsh context. For example exploring the application of a data gathering instrument, perhaps used in a previous project, in a new context of particular relevance to Wales. It will be expected that the learning and outcomes from the small project will be made available to the wider research community by a report that will be placed on the WERN website.

The allocation of funding for the bursary scheme will be on the basis of open competition. The criteria that successful applicants will be expected to fulfil for both categories will be that the applications should be collaborative across institutions, that they will be able to demonstrate how this activity is able to build capacity through the group's mix of expertise and experience, and how it can contribute to sustainable change within and/or across institutions.

B. Collaborative fellowship scheme

The group bursary activity has highlighted that within every institution there are colleagues who have the ability and the ambition to become more active and experienced researchers. These may be early, second career or mid career researchers. It is proposed that a placement scheme be funded and that it will be called the *collaborative fellowship scheme*. This will differ from other fellowship opportunities in a number of ways. Firstly its scope is less ambitious-it is short time-limited, small –scale and focused on a discrete identified research skill. Secondly, these conditions may make it more 'do-able' and accessible to colleagues who do not work in research intensive institutions where less time may be committed for research activity. It may also give confidence and increase accessibility because this is a scheme that is operated by WERN and within Wales.

Fellows will join a research project of a more experienced colleague (the mentor) for five days (in a block or five separate days) to learn about methodology, analysis, or other research issues. The proposed funding, which will be matched by the fellow's institution, will protect ten days of the fellow's time-five days to be spent on the research project and five days to carry out related development work in the fellow's own institution, or to develop fellow's expertise e.g. background reading, developing a research instrument, preparing ethics or access research documents, report writing etc. The mentor or mentor's institution will receive an honorarium in acknowledgement of the time given to mentorship for the fellow.

There will be eight fellowships available and selection will be made by open competition. Candidate fellows will be expected to identify a placement, and to have

secured the agreement of the placement and potential mentor. Candidates will be not granted a fellowship unless the placement is considered to be fit for the purpose of building the fellow's research expertise and experience. The placement may be inside or outside Wales and may be a split placement if applicants can make a clear rationale for such an arrangement. Each HEI may wish to publicise and recruit applicants from inside staff ranks via internal competition or alternatively identify an individual for whom the fellowship placement is particularly timely for their staff development, CPD and ongoing and incremental trajectory as a research active colleague.

Fellows on completion of their placement will be expected to provide a report of the experience and learning that has occurred, and this will be shared with the wider research community via the WERN website.

C. Collaborative Research with Local Authorities

WERN is interested, as capacity grows, in working with and meeting the research needs of policy makers and practitioners in the wider education community in Wales. Education Departments in Local Authorities (LAs) are potential users of educational research, and this is a possible market for educational research work that WERN would be well placed to supply. It is proposed that WERN will allocate £38,750 to commission a medium scale collaborative research project to explore how academic research can respond to the research needs of LAs in Wales as they develop, implement and evaluate policy.

This project will be collaborative at two levels. The project will be conducted by a collaborative team from more than one Welsh HEI. It will also facilitate collaboration between academic researchers and local authority users of research. The funding of this project will build capacity; it will also develop the growth of networks with local authority partners; and act as a scoping study for future WERN development. Selection of the research team will be by open competition, and should satisfy the conditions of being collaborative, and having the potential to build capacity.

D. Support Mechanisms

In order to enable less research experienced colleagues compete more equally in competitions for funding, WERN should become more pro-active in mentoring/supporting the development of applications for any of their initiatives. It is proposed that a number of support mechanisms be made available to those seeking to apply for WERN funding:

- **Regional mentor surgeries-** it is proposed that WERN will fund a mentor to be available for a day/half day to advise individuals/groups who are considering making an application for funding. The mentor would offer advice, support, and when appropriate direct mentees to existing opportunities for capacity development such as NCRM programmes in Wales and beyond, and other ESRC funded initiatives such as the new bilingualism centre at Bangor University. Opportunities would also be sought to raise awareness of the VRE/ website and how they could be beneficial to individual/group activity.
- **The creation of a WERN website.** WERN does not, at present, have a website to inform and involve participants and potential participants. A website would be created that can host news and information about WERN activity and enable easier access to support mechanisms.
- **A databank of research interests and expertise in Wales.** This would build upon the exchange of information that occurred in October 2007. This would be updated, augmented and placed on the VRE or WERN website.
- **Partnership seeking/finding website.** This could be located on the VRE or a WERN website and would be a space where colleagues can post "calls" and expressions of research interest, offers of research partnerships, projects etc. or simply place a 'wanted ad' in order to find a field worker, partner or even advice on gaining access to a learning site or group.

In addition it is proposed to hold a seminar for senior colleagues in all education and relevant departments of Welsh HEIs to report back on the progress achieved in the first phase of WERN, disseminate information about WERN phase II initiatives, and also generate a commitment to providing ongoing and substantial support for members of their academic staff to engage with educational research and participate in WERN phase II.

Leadership

As reported above, the external evaluation has indicated that the views of the effectiveness of the leadership during the pilot were very positive. However, this has not been achieved without very considerable commitments of time and energy, often in excess of the time that should have been dedicated (0.3, 0.1 and 0.4 to the Chair, Vice-Chair and Administrator respectively), to WERN. A contribution only to salaries of the Chair and Vice-Chair was made for this time and as a result their institutions, and particularly Trinity College as host institution, have given this additional financial support to WERN.

As a result it is proposed that the time dedicated to WERN activities be increased for all of the management group. Taking into account the additional time that was needed in 2007-8, and the additional strands of activity in 2008-9, a fair assessment of the time needed is 0.6 for the Chair (who is the initiative Coordinator), 0.2 for the Vice-Chair and 0.5 for the Administrator. It is also proposed that a larger contribution be made to the salaries of the Chair and Vice-Chair so as to reduce the disproportionate financial commitment of their institutions to the cost of WERN.

Anticipated Outcomes of Extended Pilot

WERN has substantially realised the outcomes described for pilot's first phase and there are the beginnings of a collaborative infrastructure for educational research in Wales. It would be anticipated that a second period of funding from September 2008 to July 2009 would build on this work and consolidate the changes that are beginning to take place. Additionally a new education research initiative in the shape of an *Institute for Applied Education Research* is to be funded by the Welsh Assembly Government from 2008, and WERN will be mindful of identifying, developing and brokering joint projects with the new centre. WERN's continued intention is to strive towards working collaboratively in ways which will develop the research capacity of individuals and institutions across Wales. Large scale projects emanating from the new centre can and should involve some research capacity building elements, not least the facilitation of placements for the collaborative research fellows.

Specific outcomes for WERN that are anticipated by the end of academic year 2008-9:

1. Successful funding applications produced by phase I bursary groups will have generated some external research awards which will be supporting collaborative research activity.
2. Bursary groups from phase II will have completed applications to funding organisations and/or other academic outputs.
3. Small project grants and collaborative fellowships will have supported the development of new, mid career and second career researchers and they will be engaged in research activity. The new knowledge and experience generated by these activities will have been reported and shared with the wider educational community via the WERN website.
4. The commissioned research project will have made links between WERN and local authority policy makers, and a scoping study will have been conducted which will have identified how WERN can respond to the research needs of local authorities as it continues to develop.
5. HEIs in Wales will have continued to work in beneficial partnership, despite differences in research funding, and in less research intensive institutions

there will be evidence of sustained support for increased research activity by staff members.

6. There will have been a growth in education research capacity taken over the whole period of funding and this will be measured by:
 - The numbers and type of staff new-to-research who have become involved;
 - The change (if any) in the levels of research expertise reported by participating academics;
 - The numbers of published papers and conference papers that have resulted from WERN activity;
 - The number of collaborative grant applications, involving two or more institutions that have been made to funding organisations

Evaluation

WERN will carry on the monitoring and evaluation of all its activities. The outputs of 2007-8 funded bursary groups will continue to be monitored to ensure that funding proposals are completed, submitted and that the results of the application are known. The internal evaluation will also include requests for interim reports from all the funded participants mid-way through their period of funding to ensure that their progress is satisfactory and that their anticipated outcomes will be realised. An external 'critical friend' will evaluate, towards the end of the award, whether the outcomes that have been anticipated above for WERN have been achieved.

References

Rees, G & Power, S. (2007) Educational Research and the Re-structuring of the State:the impacts of parliamentary devolution in Wales. *European Educational Research Journal*, 6,1,87-100