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Consultation – summary of responses

Sêr Cymru research funding - consultation on next phase

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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Top line summary

The consultation received 78 responses in total, with the large majority from research organisations or academic institutions across Wales. Respondents were asked for their views on potential components, themes, naming of the programme, outcomes, equality, diversity and the Welsh language. Whilst limitations are unavoidable and acknowledged, the levels of agreement from respondents, respondent rankings and associated free-text comments provided valuable insight into these key areas.

All of the eight suggested components were viewed favourably for inclusion by respondents, however in the context of limited funds, the components with the highest ranking were:

- PhD studentships
- Capacity building awards
- National Research Networks

These components were viewed as offering a valuable opportunity to maintain and progress research excellence in Wales, with the networks in particular offering an opportunity for collaborative research and increased funding leverage in key priority areas. Despite considerable in principle support for Sêr Cymru PhD studentships, significant concerns regarding feasibility were highlighted, including incompatibility with the timeframes over which funding would be required and would be available through the programme. It was also highlighted that there might be a greater benefit and need for post-doctoral opportunities to retain talent and build capacity. Additional components were suggested for consideration (e.g., funding to support clinical academic placements or public engagement), however the risks of spreading Sêr Cymru resource too thinly across too many components was emphasised.

The lowest ranked component was 'Funding for workshops and events'. Whilst there were many positive comments about the lower ranked components, the main reasons for a lower ranking included the duplication of existing opportunities with the suggestion that collaboration with these would be preferable and the possibility for their incorporation as part of other proposed components without the need for separation.

Most respondents offered positive views on the opportunity to submit a phased, multi-component application due to the potential for greater flexibility and strategic working. However, it was also noted that this might increase complexity and uncertainty in project continuation.

The highest ranked themes were:

- Life Sciences
- Health and Social Care
- Engineering, closely followed by
- Low carbon and Net Zero

These broadly align with current government priorities and the existing Sêr Cymru National Research Networks, with additional thematic areas such as technology (of multiple types) and mathematics also highlighted for consideration. The lowest ranked broad theme was 'Tourism, Sports, Arts'.

Respondents generally agreed with the cross-cutting themes of 'Social Sciences', 'Digital', 'Welsh language' and 'Well-being'. Some respondents expressed concern around the

overlap of the cross-cutting themes with other themes and that if alignment was made mandatory, they could be unhelpfully restrictive.

There was a clear preference for 'Sêr Cymru IV' when compared to 'Sêr Cymru National Institute of Advanced Studies (SCNIAS)', for reasons of consistency with previous phases and to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation.

Many respondents agreed with focussing on collaboration as an outcome, however the need for collaborations to be credible and sustainable was highlighted and respondents indicated that other outcomes such as science communication and dissemination activities, commercial engagements and funding leverage should also be considered.

Considerations around equality, diversity and Welsh language were viewed as vitally important for the next phase of Sêr Cymru, with several potential mechanisms for enhancement identified.

Finally, whilst respondents strongly supported and welcomed proposals for a future stage of the Sêr Cymru programme, concerns were shared that the limited funding would be insufficient to meet the current and anticipated challenges for Wales, including the potential for a loss of research capacity, expertise and potential to leverage additional funding.

The findings from this consultation will be utilised to inform recommendations on a proposed framework for the next phase of the Sêr Cymru research funding programme. This framework will remain flexible in order to review and respond to emerging priorities, enable alignment with existing activities internally and externally, and to ensure research excellence and collaboration opportunities in Wales are maximised. The framework and subsequent funding opportunities will be shared as soon as feasible via the Sêr Cymru webpages and communication channels.

Background

The Sêr Cymru research funding programme has existed for just under a decade and has facilitated impactful, interdisciplinary research in areas such as life sciences, environment, engineering and Coronavirus (COVID-19). It has successfully built research capacity and capability in Wales, generating over £191 million in research income. Sêr Cymru II remains operational until the end of June 2023, when European funding for the programme comes to an end. The budget for 2022-23 is currently fully committed in support of Ser Cymru II.

Following a successful Sêr Cymru ‘enhancing competitiveness’ equipment call which has awarded approximately £2.3 million, the funding available from Welsh Government for the next phase is within the region of £10 million over 2 financial years (2023 to 2024 and 2024 to 2025). Should additional budget or income become available in the current financial year, we will look to feed into the programme where possible.

Despite these constraints, Sêr Cymru aims to continue to facilitate and build upon capacity for the delivery of excellent and high-impact scientific research across Wales.

In August 2022, we asked for [views on proposals for the next phase of Sêr Cymru research funding programme](#).

Aims and objectives

The aim of this document is to summarise evidence from the consultation and support the prioritisation and refinement of delivery mechanisms to ensure the continuing success of Sêr Cymru.

Whilst this document provides a summary of findings from the consultation and will be used to inform decision-making, it does not indicate a definitive conclusion regarding the framework for the next phase of Sêr Cymru funding. Details of future funding opportunities will be made available on the Sêr Cymru webpages as soon as feasible.

Overview of consultation responses

There were 78 responses received in total, including 61 via online consultation form, 15 via emailed consultation form and two received via emailed letter detailing views narratively, without use of the consultation form. No postal responses were received.

The majority of responses via the consultation form were from people who considered themselves to be from research/academic institutions (n = 66), our target audience. Two responses were received from people who considered themselves to be from the private sector and two responses were received from people who considered themselves to be from the public sector. Six respondents specified ‘Other’ groups including previous members of Sêr Cymru independent expert panel (n = 3), representation from the National Health Service, a retired academic and a respondent with a career in industry and academia. Those who submitted letters were from organisations with relevant insight and experience into the issues surrounding academic research and funding.

Of the people who provided their email address, it was possible to determine that at least one response was received from each of the universities across Wales, including

Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff University, Swansea University, University of South Wales, University of Wales Trinity St David and Wrexham Glyndŵr University. Responses were also received from people based at universities in England and Scotland, including the University of Chester, University of Liverpool, University of Birmingham and University of Edinburgh. The remainder were from people who did not disclose their email address and therefore their academic affiliation is unknown.

Analysis of responses

Data from online and email responses received via the consultation form were combined for analysis. Views from the two letters received have also been incorporated.

Agreement and priority ranking of potential components and themes from online and email responses are presented in chart and narrative formats.

Qualitative responses (i.e., free-text comments included in the online/email/letter responses) were read and considered. For each question, responses were grouped, themed and described. Where necessary, responses that were relevant to another question or theme were re-grouped accordingly.

For 'incoming' and 'outgoing' international fellowships, many comments were relevant to both and therefore responses were combined in the narrative description.

The following sections of the report summarise the responses to each consultation question.

Strengths and limitations

This consultation was a shorter, eight-week consultation rather than the 12 weeks usually recommended; however this time period was deemed appropriate, timely and in public interest in order to move at pace with the ongoing changes relating to research funding at a UK-level and because the key stakeholders formed a relatively niche group. However, it is recognised that this may have had some negative impact on the response rate achieved.

It is important to note that findings will likely be influenced by the interests and disciplines of those who accessed and decided to respond to the consultation. Due to the option for respondents to complete the survey anonymously, it is not possible to identify or comment on the subject areas of all respondents and their subsequent responses. Therefore, whilst the levels of agreement and ranking of components and themes are useful to consider, this data should be interpreted with caution.

Views on potential components

Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they would support inclusion of eight potential components of the next Sêr Cymru research funding programme. These were described as shown in Table 1 below.

Component	Description
Capacity Building Awards	A flexible strand of funding to support time-limited new researcher positions and enable the programme to build upon the capacity and capability already achieved (for example, Fellowships, 'Rising Stars', Research Chairs or proposals that support the development of Clusters of Excellence in strategic priority areas).
Incoming International Fellowships	Funding for outstanding academics or business leaders linked to universities to visit Wales for a period of up to two months to develop collaborations and offer opportunities for the enrichment of research life in Wales.
Outgoing International Fellowships	Funding for researchers at all career stages to visit internationally recognised centres and academics for up to two months to develop collaborations and international experience.
Industry Academia Fellowships	Financial support for National and International Fellowships that sit at the interface of academia and industry, to sharpen the focus of research towards business needs and potential collaboration.
PhD Studentships	A dedicated funding stream to help grow research capacity and cover the costs of doctoral training at Universities in Wales.
Returning Fellowships	A flexible funding stream designed to encourage retention and capture talent in Wales by supporting post-doctoral researchers returning from a period of absence.
National Research Networks	Provide support to establish or support existing networks between academics and associated organisations and industries across Wales in specific themed areas of expertise.
Funding for workshops and events	An opportunity to submit proposals to run dedicated workshops and/or symposia in an area of relevance to researchers in their institution and across Wales.

Table 1: Potential components for inclusion in the next phase of the Sêr Cymru research funding programme.

All of the eight potential components were well-supported, with each of the eight components supported by at least 65% of respondents.

Respondents were also asked to give a ranking for each of the eight potential components, with 73 complete responses received in total. As shown in Chart 1 below, the highest ranked components (based on those components with the highest number of 'Rank 1' responses) were 'PhD studentships', 'Capacity building awards', and 'National Research Networks'. The lowest ranked component (based on the highest number of 'Rank 8' responses) was 'Funding for workshops and events'.

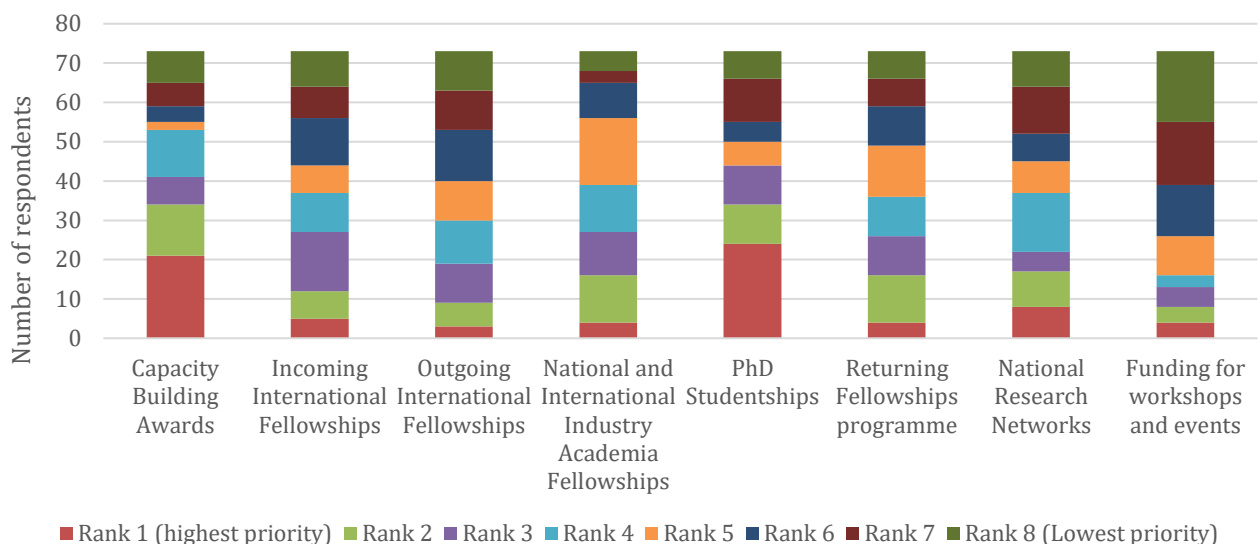


Chart 1: Responses to the question “Where would you rank each of the components? Please indicate a ranking number between 1 and 8, where 1 = top priority and 8 = lowest priority. Please give a different ranking for each element.”

Respondents were invited to provide additional comments on each of the potential components, whether they felt any components were missing and whether an opportunity to propose a phased project incorporating several components would be valued. These comments are summarised below.

PhD studentships (doctoral training)

This component was supported by 83% of respondents. Sixty-one respondents provided additional comments, and these are summarised below.

There was general support for PhD studentships as they provide the opportunity for excellent research to be delivered, ideas to be further developed and for existing post-graduate researchers to develop a research career, including establishing links and impact with industry and practice. Furthermore, respondents highlighted how studentships could be beneficially linked to other potential components, such as ‘Capacity building awards’.

A lack of Wales-specific funding for PhD studentships was highlighted, especially now that the European-funded Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS) programme is nearing its end, with the potential that Sêr Cymru could help to fill that gap. However it was also noted that there are several PhD schemes already available via other UK funding sources and therefore a role for Sêr Cymru in facilitating uptake of schemes already in existence was suggested, alongside considering joint-funding with other providers.

Despite the potential benefits, significant concerns were highlighted around the length of time and funding available for the next phase of Sêr Cymru and whether this would be sufficient to feasibly offer competitively funded PhD studentship opportunities that would attract the best candidates. This was even when options to split funding between Sêr Cymru and the academic institution were considered, to cover the potential and often variable timeframes that completing a PhD can involve. Masters by Research options were suggested as a potentially feasible alternative.

A lack of post-doctoral opportunities to encourage students trained in Wales to stay in Wales and continue their career, was also highlighted as a higher priority problem to tackle, in order to maintain the flow of researchers along a career path.

Capacity building awards

This component was supported by 87% of respondents. 55 respondents provided additional comments and these are summarised below.

Many indicated that this 'Capacity building' funding is vital to the maintenance and progression of research excellence in Wales. Focusing on building on current strengths in Wales to attract the most talented researchers and raise the profile of research in Wales was viewed as having the potential to offer the most benefit.

Several respondents noted that retaining talent in Wales should be a key priority in the next phase. Due to the frequent loss of talented researchers in the early stages of a research career where funding is insufficient and insecure, it was highlighted that the inclusion of further support for early/mid-career academics through 'Capacity Building Awards' could aid this retention.

Some respondents who were not so supportive of 'Capacity Building Awards' in the next phase raised concerns. Primarily, with a reduced budget, some respondents felt that other components should be prioritised, and the programme simplified, particularly because the timescale of the programme and associated funding might potentially be too limited to offer opportunities that would have the most impact, such as 'Fellowships', 'Rising Stars', 'Research Chairs', or 'Clusters of Excellence' that were included in the description.

It is worth noting that this component was relatively broad in the definition described in the consultation document and is therefore likely to have resulted in considerable variation in interpretation of the term 'Capacity building awards' amongst respondents.

National Research Networks

This component was supported by 76% of respondents. 55 respondents provided additional comments and these are summarised below.

Many respondents were in general support of funding for 'National Research Networks' and cited the benefits of the three existing networks ([Low Carbon Energy and Environment](#), [Engineering](#) and [Life Sciences](#)), including how they were member-led communities with their strategy led by the academics within them, and how they offered value for money due to their track record for facilitating the development of partnerships for larger bids and consequently funding leverage.

However, some respondents were tentatively supportive and others were unsure of the potential for added value, especially as the amount of funding available to support networks in the future is likely to be more limited and running costs may be high. In addition, some respondents identified a stronger need to support those earlier in their careers.

It was generally felt that the networks would require significant focus in terms of topics and remit to avoid duplicity however there was also a view that the networks could usefully have a role in enabling an element of curiosity-driven research, thus offering an alternative to current approaches to research funding.

It was generally agreed that the scope of any networks should be 'international' and not limited 'nationally' to Wales as this would further enhance the improved visibility that establishing a network can bring for individuals and groups.

Additional ideas for new networks included those across different disciplines as well as different population cohorts, such as health, adult and child social care, community, rurality and mathematical modelling.

Incoming and Outgoing International fellowships

'Incoming fellowships' were supported by 68% of respondents. 'Outgoing fellowships' were supported by 70% of respondents. Fifty-seven and fifty-four respondents provided additional comments for 'incoming' and 'outgoing' international fellowships respectively.

Overall, respondents agreed that bringing in and securing talented overseas researchers should be one of the main priorities in the next phase of the Sêr Cymru programme and a role for these fellowships in augmenting interactions with European collaborators was highlighted. It was also noted that with careful management, international business links could also be forged.

However, many indicated that including international fellowships may involve some overlap with other schemes (e.g. Taith) and due to funding limitations, collaborating with other schemes would be most beneficial for the Sêr Cymru programme going forward. Furthermore, some respondents believed that with a reduced budget, 'investing in home grown talent' would be a better focus for the programme.

One respondent raised the concern that the increased prevalence of remote working could impact on how necessary this type of component is viewed and how it might operationalise with the potential for a reduced need for travel in order to collaborate.

For outgoing fellowships in particular, respondents noted that this would be a good opportunity for those earlier in their career to train with others and gain experience. However, four respondents noted that they would be in favour only if there would be guarantee that awardees would return to Wales post-fellowship. Two respondents also commented that international opportunities might be difficult for those with commitments in Wales and therefore additional support should be provided to improve accessibility.

Several respondents noted additional aspects which could also be considered as part of an 'international' component. These included:

- An exchange programme, rather than either an 'outgoing' or 'incoming' international fellowship only.
- Travel between UK nations could also be considered as 'international' as overseas travel and accommodation might be too costly.
- The award could operate as a secondment.
- Increased timescale e.g. increase from proposed two month period, to a minimum of three months.

Returning fellowships

This component was supported by 71% of respondents. 50 respondents provided additional comments and these are summarised below.

Respondents felt that returning fellowships offered multiple benefits, including attracting researchers back into a career in science after a break due to personal circumstances, or time spent in another area of employment such as industry. Significant equality and diversity benefits were also noted, including that as researchers often leave academia for reasons outside of their control (e.g., caring responsibilities, illness, lack of suitable posts), provision of an accessible opportunity for those who wish to reengage would be welcomed. It was highlighted that these kinds of awards have previously run successfully through the Sêr Cymru Low Carbon Energy and Environment research network function and that linking with opportunities that are available through other organisations (e.g. [Daphne Jackson Trust](#)) could also be explored.

Due to limited resources however, many indicated that there may be no need to have a separate scheme for this purpose and the opportunity for returning researchers could be made accessible as part of a general capacity-building call open to all career stages.

Moreover, many respondents suggested that the award would need to be agile, with quick decision-making and a guarantee of continuing employment, in order to be attractive and offer successful outcomes in the long-term.

Industry academia fellowships

This component was supported by 79% of respondents. 56 respondents provided additional comments, as summarised below.

Those who were in support noted that this kind of component could be beneficial in building networks to encourage commercialisation and economic growth for Wales, if managed carefully.

However, respondents raised that industry academia fellowships may be replicating activities and programmes already in place (e.g., those run through the Royal Academy of Engineering, Royal Society and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships run through Innovate UK) and that Sêr Cymru should consider collaborating with these programmes rather than duplicating a process and utilising limited resources.

Several respondents provided additional suggestions which could also be considered if industry academic fellowships are incorporated as part of the next phase. These included:

- Co-funding with industry partner
- Prioritise funding to those areas where research excellence has already been delivered.
- Transfer of knowledge and resource to take place both ways i.e., researcher to spend time in industry and industry partner to spend time in academia
- Enable a broad definition of 'industry' to be applied
- Funding for shorter partnerships that are designed to facilitate transition towards an application for funding towards an existing scheme

Funding for workshops and events

This component was supported by 74% of respondents. 56 respondents provided additional comments, and these are summarised below.

There was general support among respondents for this component, with workshops and events explained as being helpful to create links between emerging and existing key players and for increasing coordination. However, there was a common view that this component may not be highest priority for limited funds and that funding for workshops and events could be included as part of other proposed components for Sêr Cymru. It was also noted that funds internal and external to universities already exist to support these kinds of activities and any additional provision should be aligned in order to add value.

Additional suggestions included offering funding to support activities following events (i.e., follow-up visits are often required to establish a collaboration, but do not happen due to limited resource), support for international networking and funding for conference hosting. It was noted how delivering Sêr Cymru-specific events offer an opportunity to develop a sense of a Sêr Cymru community, with additional potential opportunities for public and policy engagement.

Finally, it was suggested that, if included, workshops and events should be limited and targeted to specific areas and offer an occasion to discuss opportunities for developing the Welsh research base and support of the programme for government.

A phased, multi-component application

This concept was supported by 62% of respondents. 38 respondents provided additional comments, and these are summarised below.

Most respondents offered positive views on the opportunity to submit a phased, multi-component application due to the potential for greater flexibility and possibilities for proposing a larger and more strategic 'programme' of funding and researcher posts. It was noted that this kind of option is currently not available via some other UK funders to researchers wanting to lead research programmes from universities in Wales and so would be welcomed.

However, it was also noted that phased, multi-component options could increase complexity that may require increased, longer-term funding as well as significantly more management resource than what is currently available. It was noted how exploratory phases could potentially help ensure value for money of later phases, however questions were also asked around the insecurity that might be associated with phasing the programme (i.e. whether there would be points where the research may be stopped).

Potentially missing components

42 respondents provided additional comments, and these are summarised below.

It was noted that there were already a high number of potential components, and that care needs to be taken to ensure that funding is not spread too thinly across a new Sêr Cymru programme. It was also reiterated that overlap with existing opportunities should be explored to avoid duplication and that early career researchers should be a focus. However a number of potentially missing components suggested for inclusion were identified as below:

- Grant funding opportunities for specific research/projects.
- Dedicated clinical academic fellowships i.e. a specific funding source to enhance NHS engagement in research to enhance impact.

- Combined academic staff-scientist/research positions i.e. to enable people to maintain academic positions, whilst taking up a Sêr Cymru-funded research opportunity.
- A Sêr Cymru equipment call (Note: a Sêr Cymru equipment call was launched in October 2022, with 16 funding applications awarded in December 2022).
- Opportunities for researchers who have missed out on United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding, but with high scores and therefore high future potential.
- Funding for short-term feasibility studies.
- Consolidating grants for established Principal Investigators to strengthen independence.
- Funding to support public engagement agenda.
- Funding to support specific short-term interactions with companies, particularly Small to Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- Funding to enable access to and sharing of facilities.

Views on potential broad and cross-cutting themes

Respondents were asked to give a ranking for each of the nine potential broad themes, with 71 complete responses received in total. As shown in Chart 2 below, the highest ranked broad themes (based on those themes with the highest number of ‘Rank 1’ responses), were ‘Life Sciences’, ‘Health and social care’, ‘Engineering’, closely followed by ‘Low Carbon and Net Zero’. These broadly align with current government priorities and the existing Sêr Cymru National Research Networks. The lowest ranked broad theme was ‘Tourism, Sports and Arts’ (based on the highest number of ‘Rank 9’ responses).

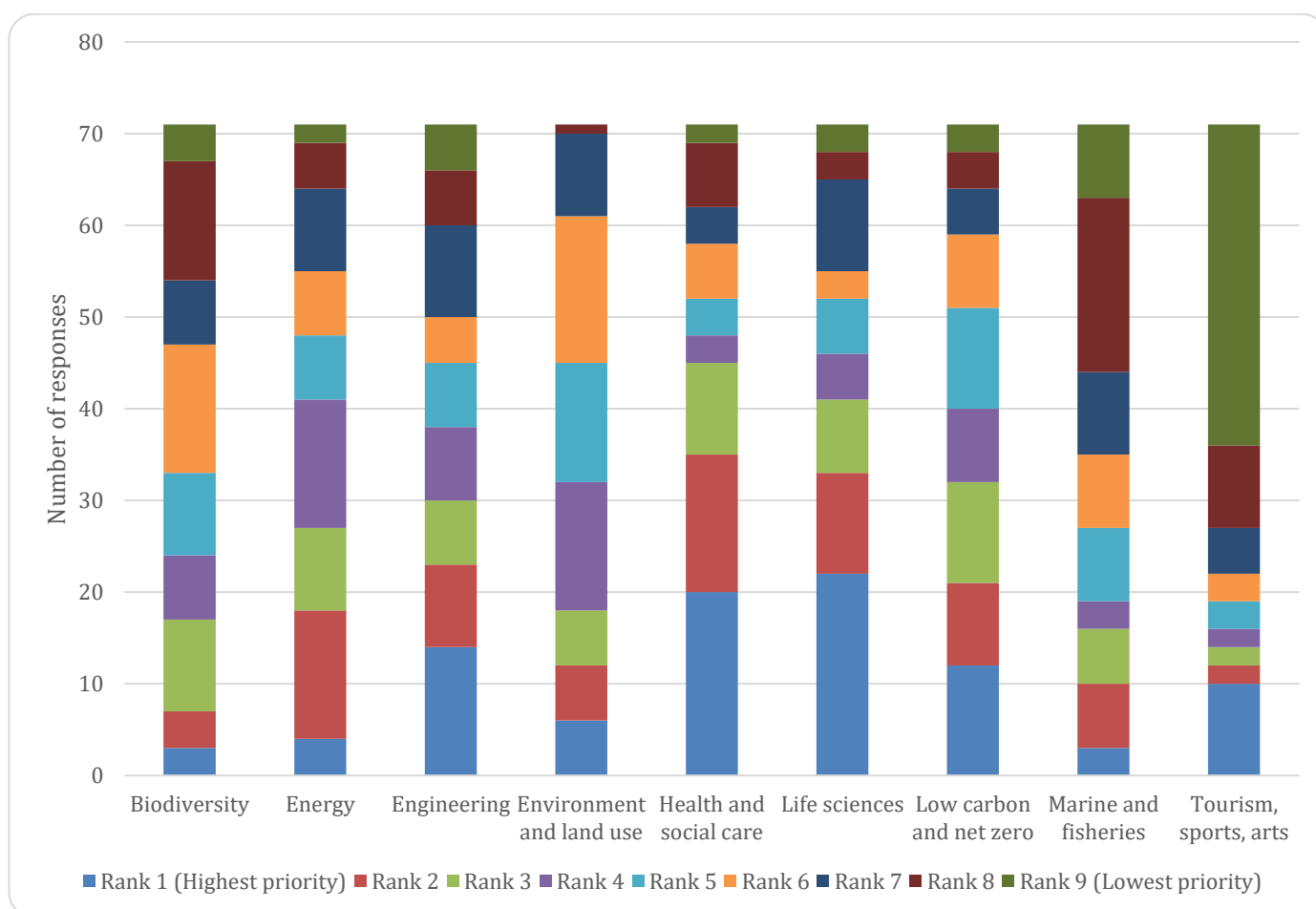


Chart 2: Responses to the question “Where would you rank each of the broad themes? Please indicate a ranking number between 1 and 9, where 1 = top priority and 9 = lowest priority. Please give a different ranking for each element.”

Respondents were also asked if they agreed with the cross-cutting themes of ‘Social Sciences’, ‘Digital’, ‘Welsh language’ and ‘Well-being’. Around half (54%) of respondents indicated agreement, with fifty-three respondents providing additional comments, as described below.

Despite there being no clear majority view on agreement, many respondents expressed concern that unless defined appropriately, cross-cutting themes in general may be unnecessary and unhelpfully restrictive. For example, it would need to be made clear whether aligning with the cross-cutting themes would be an essential requirement for a funding application to be considered, or whether they would be identified as potential priorities to be considered or incorporated, only where relevant.

Potentially missing themes

Respondents were asked if they felt any themes were missing, whether broad or cross-cutting. There was no clear majority in views on this issue, with 46% indicating they felt themes were missing. 44 respondents provided additional comments as described below.

Broad and cross-cutting themes identified as potentially ‘missing’ included: technology (of multiple types), diversity and inequalities, artificial intelligence, sustainability, innovation, education, flooding, agriculture, medicines/therapeutics for humans and animals, manufacturing, recycling, arts and humanities, big data, mathematics and modelling.

It was also noted by respondents that the programme could be at risk of covering too many themes and that there was likely significant overlap, including the themes of social sciences, well-being and health and social care.

Respondents highlighted that the next phase of Sêr Cymru should identify and invest in areas of existing research strength and capacity to deliver effectively. However others suggested funding should focus on thematic areas such as ‘Sports and Arts’, that are currently underfunded despite being identified as strategic priorities for Wales. The inclusion of ‘Welsh language’ as a research theme per se was questioned, however it was noted as an important central consideration for all research undertaken in Wales. Please see later sections for more detail on responses relevant to the Welsh language.

Finally, the requirement to consider the themes and priorities highlighted by other organisations across Wales and the UK was highlighted.

Naming of the next Sêr Cymru programme

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with ‘Sêr Cymru National Institute of Advanced Studies (SCNIAS)’ or ‘Sêr Cymru IV’ as the proposed title for the next phase of the programme. There was a clear preference for ‘Sêr Cymru IV’ with 71% indicating agreement with this proposed title.

48 respondents provided additional thoughts on a new title for the programme and generally felt that 'Sêr Cymru IV' was preferable as it was concise and because the name was established as a brand, it was more likely to be effective.

It was suggested that whilst including additional wording may be more meaningful to some and potentially offer more international credibility, it could also be confusing. In particular, the word 'institute' could be viewed as indicating an element of exclusivity rather than being open to all, or the existence of a physical location. There was also a lack of clarity around the wording 'advanced studies', which could be ambiguous in terms of the meaning, with a possible association with teaching rather than research.

Enhanced collaboration as a potential outcome

Respondents were asked if they agreed with 'Enhanced collaboration' as an outcome for the next phase of Sêr Cymru. A large proportion of respondents (84%) agreed with this, and 49 respondents provided additional comments as described below.

There was general agreement that collaboration (including internal and external to universities, interdisciplinary and geographical) is vital to research excellence and knowledge advancement, particularly between academia and external partners. Personal development, networking for early career researchers, more efficient use of facilities, development of new clusters of excellence, creation of relationships with local enterprises and driving coordination were noted as additional benefits of identifying collaboration as a key outcome. It was also suggested that collaborative or shared positions between institutions could potentially feature as part of the next Sêr Cymru programme, with the opportunity to enhance competitiveness for Wales when applying to larger funding programmes.

However, it was noted that collaborations need to be credible, and the sustainability of collaborations needs to be supported in order to be effective. There was also a view that focussing on research excellence should naturally bring about effective collaboration and care should be taken not to encourage 'forced' collaboration (e.g., by making it a requirement of funding), that may not be beneficial and may actually be less advantageous.

Finally, it was highlighted that collaboration, if included as an outcome, should be accompanied by other outcomes such as papers, patents, public and commercial engagements and leveraged funding.

Equality and diversity

72 respondents provided comments relevant to the question "What mechanisms could we put in place to make Sêr Cymru funding opportunities more attractive and accessible to a diverse range of applicants?"

Several potential mechanisms identified by respondents for consideration in making Sêr Cymru funding opportunities more accessible were identified and summarised below:

- Mentorship for underrepresented groups
- Blinded applications and review process

- Diverse funding panel membership, including international reviewers who may have less political interest or personal eligibility for funding
- Targeted funds for underrepresented groups e.g., an engineering funding call only open to women
- Longer and more flexible periods of funding, including part time opportunities.
- Longer lead-in times with swift decision-making processes to improve certainty and facilitate planning
- Broad advertising through a variety of channels, including 'meet the funder' workshops
- Simple and transparent application process that ensures inclusion is highlighted clearly in all documentation
- Placing less emphasis on matched funding as early career researchers often find this more difficult to identify
- Evaluation and monitoring of applicant experience
- Facilitating movement between industry and academia
- Make use of networks and communities of different groups of researchers already in place
- Focus on equity of access (i.e., providing more opportunities for those less able to access), rather than equality in outcome (i.e., striving for equal representation across groups).

Welsh Language

Two questions specifically about the Welsh language were asked as part of the consultation. The first asked respondents for their views on the effects that the Sêr Cymru programme would have on the Welsh language, with 55 responses received.

The potential for positive effects were noted, including that for these effects to be realised, following current policies and good practice relating to preserving and promoting the Welsh language would need to continue, proposals and researchers communicating in both languages would need to be treated and welcomed equally and opportunities for those who wish to participate through the medium of Welsh would need to be provided. It was suggested by some that specific funding for research relevant to supporting the Welsh language should be set aside and others highlighted those organisations, such as Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, who are also having a positive influence in this sphere.

It was suggested that the positive impacts of Sêr Cymru could be brought about by enhanced community engagement with bilingual communities in Wales. However, it was noted that academic papers and other dissemination activities for a wider international audience would need to continue to be provided in English.

The second question asked for views on how the Sêr Cymru programme could be formulated or changed to have positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language, with 53 responses received.

A number of suggestions were made, including:

- Supporting Welsh language research networking and training opportunities across Wales, including between Welsh and non-Welsh speaking researchers.
- Further promotion of research being conducted through the medium of Welsh.

- Support to bring about change and improvements suggested as part of Welsh language-relevant research.
- Research funding directly targeted towards this agenda, including support to increase the availability of Welsh medium studentships and associated supervisory capacity.
- Ensure all documentation and application forms are available bilingually, Welsh speakers are able to access events through the medium of Welsh and that research outputs in the medium of Welsh are encouraged.
- Ensuring sufficient consultation with all stakeholders on Welsh language issues, including asking applicants and/or Universities to consider the impact of any proposed research activities on the Welsh
- Engagement with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and other key partners in this field.

The need to ensure that non-Welsh speakers are not inadvertently discouraged from engaging with the Sêr Cymru programme was also highlighted.

Additional comments

Respondents were given the opportunity to give details of anything else they would like to feedback about the proposed funding programme. 40 respondents provided additional comments in this section.

Many respondents used this section to indicate their support for Sêr Cymru generally and its past successes, that they were grateful of the opportunity to comment and that the new phase would be very much needed and welcomed, especially to support those early in their careers and who are most at risk of leaving a research career.

The need for wide engagement including all universities across Wales in developing and delivering the programme was highlighted, especially as a level of co-funding from the university will likely be requested. The need to focus limited funding on key areas whilst avoiding duplication and 'spreading too thin' was reiterated.

Finally, the need to fund research in Wales properly to continue to build capacity and increase competitiveness to access funding offered by UK-wide organisations was powerfully highlighted, alongside the risks of not doing so, such as the loss of talent, expertise and the potential to leverage additional funding into Wales. Whilst respondents strongly supported the proposal for funding for the next stage of the Sêr Cymru programme, concerns were shared that £10 Million over three years is likely to be insufficient due to the anticipated challenges that Wales is currently facing. These challenges include the ongoing impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic, economic instability and significant changes and uncertainties across the research funding landscape.

Conclusion and next steps

We would like to thank everyone who has offered their views. The consultation received a wide range of responses from individuals engaged with research across Wales. All of the eight proposed components were viewed favourably for inclusion by respondents, however useful insight in terms of priority was obtained, with the highest ranked components identified as 'PhD studentships', 'Capacity building awards', and 'National Research Networks'. For the proposed themes, those highest ranked were 'Life Sciences', 'Health and Social Care', 'Engineering' closely followed by 'Low carbon and Net Zero'. Whilst these components and themes were the highest ranked, respondents also highlighted important

advantages and disadvantages associated with elements of the proposed programme that require careful consideration, alongside a need to streamline and focus in the context of limited resources and time.

The views, suggestions and queries raised through this consultation, together with ongoing and emerging government priorities, will be considered and utilised to inform recommendations on a proposed framework for the next phase of the Sêr Cymru research funding programme.

This is a challenging time for research in Wales and across the UK and Sêr Cymru will need to remain flexible in order to regularly review its priorities and align activities appropriately. This will help ensure research and researcher excellence is maximised, capitalising on opportunities for collaboration and inward investment.

Details on the next phase of the Sêr Cymru research funding programme and subsequent funding opportunities will be shared as soon as feasible via the Sêr Cymru webpages and communication channels.