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Wales

Name of Meeting
Knowledge, Research
and Information
Committee
Date of Meeting
17 June 2025
Agenda item:
3.2

Update on the Implementation of the Research and Evaluation Strategy

Executive lead:	Iain Bell, Director of Research, Data and Digital
Author:	Elen de Lacy, Research, Development and Strategy Lead Alisha Davies, Head of Research and Evaluation

Approval/Scrutiny route:	Director of Research, Data and Digital
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Purpose

The purpose of the paper is to provide an update to KRIC on the progress and implementation of the PHW Research and Evaluation Strategy, 2023-2026.

Recommendation:

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The Committee is asked to:

- Note** the contents of this paper and **receive assurance** on progress on the implementation of the organisational Research and Evaluation Strategy.

Link to PHW [Strategic Plan](#)

PHW has an agreed strategic plan, which has identified six strategic priorities and well-being objectives.

This report contributes to the following:

Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective	All Strategic Priorities/Well-being Objectives
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Summary impact analysis

Equality and Health Impact Assessment	No Equality and Health Impact Assessment has been undertaken as a decision is not required by the Committee.
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Risk and Assurance	Risks are being managed in accordance with the Board Assurance Framework.
Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act	This report supports the implementation of the Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act by demonstrating a transparent approach to delivering improvements that address the wider determinants of health, in line with the Duty of Quality.
Financial implications	None
People implications	The process applies to all staff undertaking research and evaluation.

1. Purpose / situation

The [Research and Evaluation \(R&E\) Strategy](#), published in October 2023 ensures that PHW is building and strengthening R&E excellence across the organisation and in collaboration with partners. To support the implementation and oversight of the strategy, the R&E Strategic Oversight Group (RESOG) meets monthly to coordinate work aligned to a co-produced implementation plan. RESOG is the cross-organisational senior leadership group responsible for developing and supporting research and evaluation in line with Public Health Wales priorities and the organisational R&E Strategy.

The R&E Strategy is focused on four key pillars:



This paper describes the progress of the strategy to date, including monitoring and assurance of delivery.

2. Description/Assessment

2.1 Annual Performance Review with Health and Care Research Wales

On 13th March 2025, Health and Care Research Wales (HCRW) met with PHW for our Annual Performance Meeting. HCRW were very complementary to our progress to date, reflecting the “the activities and plans that you have in place are very mature and focused” (Appendix A, page 2). HCRW welcomed our approach to embedding the NHS R&D Framework into our R&E strategy, the key achievements over the last year (more details in 2.3.2), our system leadership towards the development of a vision for academic public health in Wales (more detail in 2.4.1), and our approach to the development of strategic partnerships.

HCRW reflected on the areas of synergy between the two organisations and identified four areas to explore working together to build on the successes to date. These were; developing researchers, opportunities to deliver research, communications and continued progress on the NHS R&D Framework implementation. We agreed to meet quarterly to build on the positive relationship between our organisations.

2.2 Progress from December to June 2025

An implementation plan for the R&E Strategy agreed by RESOG, focuses on the following key areas:

- a. **Developing and implementing R&E standards** to strengthen and support the development and production of R&E by the organisation.
- b. **Developing R&E capacity and capability** to support staff to develop and apply R&E skills to increase workforce capacity and capability and contribute towards creating a learning organisation.
- c. **Developing and establishing effective strategic research partnerships** with higher educational institutes, health boards, local authorities and others to support the development and delivery of public health R&E.
- d. **Developing effective communications and engagement** for R&E across the organisation and externally.

Specific information on progress against the four areas of focus in the R&E Strategy implementation over the last six months (December – June 2025) is provided below.

2.2 Developing R&E standards across the organisation

As an organisation, we want to develop and set standards for best practice for R&E, and the methods used to ensure that PHW are producing consistently high-quality products.

2.2.1 Refinement of the Research and Evaluation Strategic Oversight Group (RESOG)

A proposal to develop the autonomy of RESOG to strengthen R&E governance and ability to address barriers to enabling research across PHW was taken to the Business Executive Team in February 2025. There was agreement to update the Terms of Reference of the Group, retaining the required governance for research across PHW, whilst also ensuring the group operated as an enabling and empowering function. The Terms of Reference are being developed further with input from the RESOG members, wider engagement across PHW, and with the support of the Board Secretary and the Director of Research, Data and Digital in PHW.

2.2.2 Development of Research in pandemic response

The RESOG are working with the Emergency Planning and Response Team to inform the organisational Pandemic Response plan. Drawing on experience during COVID-19, to integrate research and evaluation capacity and capability into future pandemic response.

2.3 Developing Capacity and Capability for R&E

We want to build an organisational culture, which values R&E activities and supports staff to develop and apply research and evaluation skills to increase workforce capacity and capability, strengthen evidence-based practice and contribute towards creating a learning organisation.

2.3.1 Increasing research capacity: focus on Climate Change (Strategic Priority 6).

In February 2025, a Research Coordinator for Climate Change (Band 7) joined PHW providing dedicated capacity to maximise PHW opportunities to develop a research programme aligned to climate change. The role sits across the R&D Office and the lead for Climate Change supporting cross-organisational working and will;

- Map internal and external research strengths in climate change and health
- Develop PHW R&E Priorities on Climate change
- Develop PHWs capability and capacity in this space through building academic partnerships and collaborative research bids within HEIWs and UK partners.

This represents an opportunity to demonstrate the value of dedicated capacity focused on one strategic priority, to build research capacity and capability with others, to support PHW in this area.

2.3.2 Increasing capacity through external bid applications and personal awards

Over the last 12 months, PHW has developed its capacity and capability through securing successful research bids. These include - **four** PHW-led research grants, highlighting the individual excellence of researchers within PHW. **Ten externally funded successful bids and grants** have been secured to support PHW staff, ensuring investment in vital research projects. Full detail on these grants if provided in Appendix B.

Progress against KPIs: FYs 2023/24 and 2024/25

Financial Year	Total Successful Awards (n)	PHW CI/PI (n)	Different Funders (n)	Income to PHW (£)	Total value to Wales (£)
2023/24	8	3	7	487,000	1,964,368
2024/25	10	4	6	849,849	8,406,370

Highlights for individual staff members include: A HCRW Senior Leadership Award to Prof. Tom Connor (PHW Genomics); and Liam Mahedy awarded a place in the

Welsh Crucible 2025 Cohort – a programme designed to foster personal, professional, and leadership development among future research leaders in Wales.

Successful external bids in 2024/25 are listed in Appendix B (highlights):

- 1) Wellcome Trust – PHW in partnership with Cardiff University ISO in a Box Genomics Accreditation Framework (£300K over 36 months)
- 2) PHW-led HCRW Integrated Funding Award in partnership with the University of South Wales (£256K over 24 months)
- 3) NIHR (Digital inclusion Application Development Award) - PHW lead application awarded in partnership with the University of Oxford (£150k over 12 months)

Bids in progress include (highlights):

- 1) PHW-led BBSRC (UKRI) bid to support a cohort of 15 PhD students around genomics and one-health
- 2) Supported a UKRI bid led by NIESR (National Institute of Economic and Social Research) to understand and model UK economic (in)activity and impact on health

2.3.3 Evaluation Capacity and Capability

The central Evaluation Team is building capacity and capability in evaluation across PHW in three main ways

- a. **PHW Evaluation Community of Practice (ECoP).** The ECoP now has over 524 members from across PHW and local public health teams to provide staff with training opportunities to support them with conducting or commissioning evaluations. Since March 2023, 11 training sessions have been delivered. We have also developed resources to support staff with their evaluation including resources on evaluation methods, evaluation of communication campaigns etc.
- b. **Evaluation Drop-in clinics:** In November 2024, the central Evaluation Team established the Evaluation Drop-In Clinics. These aim to enhance the quality and standards of evaluations within PHW, contributing to more effective decision-making and improved organisational performance. To date 24 drop-in clinics across the different directorates in PHW.
- c. **Using natural/quasi-experimental designs:** The central evaluation team has supported the evaluation of key strategic programmes delivered by PHW and key partners using robust methods including:
 - Evaluation of the 2021/22 Flu/Covid vaccine using a controlled interrupted series design.
 - Evaluation of the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board Prehab to Rehab Cancer service.
 - Baseline evaluation of the Hapus National Conversation
 - Baseline evaluation of the Hapus Strategic Partnership

We have also supported generation of strategic evidence to support the organisation including:

- The PHW Covid Learning event
- The PHW Disability and Carers survey

2.4 Developing and Establishing Effective Strategic Partnerships for R&E

We are developing and strengthening our effective collaborations and partnerships for R&E across two key areas of focus:

2.4.1 Developing a Vision for Academic Public Health Research in Wales – 2025

The Academic Public Health Report was published in May 2025

[Unified strategy needed to drive Public Health Research collaboration in Wales - Public Health Wales](#)

A follow up workshop to discuss the report and the vision for academic public health in Wales will be held on 7th July 2025. PHW will contact all Pro-Vice Chancellors of research across Wales to ask them to identify participants to work with PHW to co-develop a strategy by December 2025. This strategy will ensure that we are able to promote and develop the nation's strengths and support the next generation of public health researchers for the future.

2.4.2 Developing Academic Strategic Partnerships

In line with our strategy, PHW is open to the development of strategic partnerships with academia in areas of mutual benefit to develop a long-term, ambitious, multidisciplinary relationship, focused on co-creation, with defined and shared strategic priorities across research, innovation, education and skills, and other agendas.

As part of the development of the strategic partnership with Cardiff University, we have hosted five joint workshops to explore mutual areas of research interest and strategic alignment across PHWs six strategic priorities. The Terms of Reference to oversee the partnership is being developed, as well as identifying the key priority areas to take forward in partnership.

2.4.3. Developing effective partnerships with strategic research programmes

Key highlights include:

- 1) PHW met with [UKRI PHI](#) - UKRI Population Health Improvement Network in February 2025 to discuss integration of Wales across current funded programmes. PHI is a £35 million investment over four years, bringing together expertise and insight from across research, public health and community organisations.
- 2) [PHI-UK Policy Modelling for Health](#) – led by the University of Glasgow and part of the £35 million UKRI PHI. PHW are engaged in discussions with them

about developing modelling to look at the economic determinants of health and health inequalities.

- 3) [Our Future Health](#) (OFH) funded through UKRI (£130 million), PHW met with OFH in May 2025. PHW are in the early stages of developing a proposal with OFH for a research bid to take advantage of this rich dataset. Themes discussed include the relationship between gene expression, environment and the potential for intervention and prevention and deeper understanding of the drivers of healthy life expectancy and levers for improvement.
- 4) PHW are supporting the 5-year NIHR funded Health Determinants of Research Collaborations in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) and Torfaen. PHW have developed a Memorandum of Understanding with RCT to support research links into the organisation

2.5 Developing effective communications and engagement for R&E across the organisation and externally.

A core aim of the R&E Strategy is to develop and communicate research priorities, which will lead to greater engagement across the organisation and wider research system.

2.5.1. Communications

As part of the development of the new PHW website, we are working to ensure a programme of research activity is coordinated and promoted to highlight the extensive remit of the organisation.

3. Monitoring and Assurance

R&E Strategy indicators are being reported through the Research, Data and Digital quarterly Directorate report.

Through RESOG, all parts of the strategy are monitored and contribute to all areas of the Strategy including collaborative bids, strategic partnerships, R&E priorities and communication and engagement of R&E across the organisation.

4. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to:

- **Note** the contents of this paper and **receive assurance** on progress on the implementation of the organisational Research and Evaluation Strategy.

Appendix A. Health and Care Research Wales Annual Performance Review for PHW, response letter (dated 4/4/2025).



Ymchwil Iechyd
a Gofal Cymru
Health and Care
Research Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Public Health Wales

4 April 2025

Dear Iain, Alisha and Elen

Thank you for meeting with me and colleagues from Health and Care Research Wales (HCRW) to discuss progress particularly against the implementation of the NHS R&D Framework, share challenges and identify actions that need to be taken to improve health and care research in Public Health Wales (PHW), and discuss where the wider Health and Care Research Wales system can help.

We felt that we had a very constructive meeting, and your presentation provided a very helpful overview of your progress and set out your priorities clearly for the future.

During the meeting, we noted and were particularly interested to hear of:

- Your progress in implementing the Research and Evaluation (R&E) strategy and the strong connection with the NHS R&D framework. We noted that your research strategic oversight group oversees the implementation of your strategy and reports to the Board.
- Your success with 21 new research awards (out of which 4 have PHW Chief Investigators) bringing in a total grant income of £809k in 2024/25. You noted the value this brings in developing leaders but also the growth of research teams around them, which is great to hear.
- Your increased focus on collaborating strategically with HEIs to meet your priorities including developing PhDs with Bangor University and the strategic partnership with Cardiff University, particularly on the academic public health work.
- We noted your links with local government through supporting activities such as the HDRCs, as well as linking into public health teams in the NHS. We agreed to bring you into the HCRW led quarterly meetings with the two Welsh based HDRCs.
- The collaboration with SAIL databank and the investment into a programme of work and analytical posts, to progress a range of projects including a feasibility study to understand health inequalities in public health beyond the protected characteristics of gender/sex and deprivation levels.
- The development of the early careers network across PHW and that more PHW staff are successful in the HCRW Faculty schemes. We are pleased with the high levels of



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engagement with the HCRW Faculty and that the Head of R&E is on the HCRW Faculty funding panel.

- Your progress and leadership with the Academic Public Health project and that the report will be published soon. We discussed that the focus of this work was around developing research rather than people (hence for instance the development of links to WIN and opportunity to focus on bringing interdisciplinary teams together). We discussed the work that HCRW will be taking forward this year on improving research career pathways and joint (organisational) appointment processes and that we will ensure this is inclusive of the public health community.
- The opportunity to lead the WHO coordinating centre on digital inclusion which is a fantastic leadership opportunity for PHW.
- That you are exploring wider opportunities such as aligning with UKRI population health improvement agenda and linking with Our Future Health.

In terms of challenges –

- We noted how the breadth of public health can be challenging for academic research and there are competing priorities with a lack of chief investigators (CIs) in Wales to apply for competitive bids.
- The ongoing challenge of building sustainable partnerships across the system as Wales often gets forgotten in the wider UK research infrastructure.
- In addition, you noted the quality of patient and public involvement needs to be improved so that is more strongly embedded within the R&E communications.

We felt that the activities and plans that you have in place are very mature and focused, and during our discussion we agreed there could some areas where we could work together more closely to strengthen public health capacity and capability, and awareness of research in Wales. These areas were:

- Developing researchers – You highlighted the work that you are driving forward internally to explore career planning and mentoring across the organisation and the creation of job families, where there are obvious commonalities in thinking and research approaches used. We discussed working together to discuss the opportunity of co-designing a programme of development (like an associate CI scheme), consider what a pilot could look like and evaluate it, with a view to rolling it out if successful. Monica Busse (Director of Faculty) will be in touch to take this forward.
- Opportunities to deliver research – We noted from your presentation and your R&E strategy that there is limited focus on delivering research. There are 17 public health studies on the portfolio in Wales, and whilst only one of them is undertaken in PHW and others delivered in HBs, we discussed whether there was an opportunity here for PHW to work with public health teams within health boards to increase the number of studies. We acknowledged that this would require a degree of coordination to facilitate. It was suggested that PHW and HCRW could jointly present to the Wales peer group of public health directors to promote the research offer. We mentioned that we have not had an application for the HCRW Specialty Lead role for public health which is key to supporting this and we agreed to have a further discussion regarding how the role could be filled. In addition, we noted that we will be developing a recruitment strategy for 'out of hospital' settings this year and would welcome a further discussion to see how this can support the delivery of public health studies.

- Communications – We discussed the potential opportunity to increase the visibility and exposure of PHW research activity and we mentioned that the HCRW communications team are developing a toolkit for organisations. Once this is shared and you have had the opportunity to review, we think it might be helpful to discuss this with the HCRW communications teams, alongside approaches to public involvement, so that we can also support PHW from a national perspective and amplify any communications activity.
- Note the letter from Judith Paget and Suzanne Rankin – We have attached the letter on the Embedding Research in the NHS Programme which you received in February for ease so that you can consider when progressing developments over the year.

We highlighted that the Research Delivery Funding Stream within Welsh Government could be selected for an internal audit in the forthcoming financial year, therefore work will be undertaken to ensure NHS organisations are compliant with the terms and conditions set out in the Research Delivery Funding Grant Award Letter.

We highlighted that a self-assessment against the NHS R&D Framework will be requested in readiness for the next annual review meeting likely to be held in March 2026.

Finally, we would like to thank you for a positive meeting and a fruitful discussion. As there were several areas of synergy between developments underway with PHW and HCRW, we agreed to meet quarterly to keep discussions alive and take developments forward. We'd like to thank Diane Crone for her contribution as the independent member R&D board champion and hopefully a replacement will be in place soon. We note Diane's thanks to the R&E team for their work. Please continue to keep up the good work on supporting and delivering public health research and supporting your staff. We look forward to working with you further to maximise research opportunities in PHW.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "CThomas" with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Carys Thomas

Joint interim Head of Research and Development Division, Welsh Government
Joint interim Director of Health and Care Research Wales

Appendix B. PHW External grant income awarded in 2024/25.

Funder	Title of research programme	PHW (CI/PI)	Total award value to PHW	Total award value	Years of the award	Academic collaborators
Wellcome Trust	"ISO In a box: Developing a framework to enable the development of end-to-end genomics-based ISO 15189 and ISO 17025 accredited services, anywhere in the world"	Professor Tom Connor	£306,987	£1,961,120	3 years	Cardiff University
HCRW Integrated Funding Award	Reducing substance use-related harm among people in prison and on their release: A qualitative study.	Dr Benjamin Gray	£46,616	£256,837	2 years	University of South Wales
NIHR Application Development Award	Digital inclusion - mapping digital inclusion initiatives across the UK, and developing underpinning theoretical framework	Dr Diana Bright	£94,895	£153,276	1 year	University of Oxford

CRUK	To investigate interventions to reduce DNA rates in screening colonoscopy	Steve Court	£182,691	£198,796	2 years	Cambridge, Oxford & Surrey Universities
HCRW Faculty Award	Personal Accelerator Award	Dr Matthijs Backx	£18,598	£18,598	6 Months	n/a
All Wales Policing Academic Policing Collaboration	Public perceptions and experience of Section 1 Stop and Search in Wales	Dr Karen Hughes	£19,986	£19,986	2 years	Bangor University
UKRI	Tackling health inequalities with and for the Deaf BSL-using Communities in Wales	Helen Rose Jones	£5,760	£1,092,533	3 years	Bangor University
UKRI	Probing Coccidian Parasites: A comparative study underpinning one health drug discovery	Dr Rachel Chalmers	£37,000	n/a	4 years	Cardiff University
NIHR	VESPER	Dr Mandy Wootton	£102,316	1,975,000	3 years	Cardiff University, The University of Newcastle, University College London, University of Aberdeen

						& Manchester University
NIHR	BALLOON	Dr Catherine Moore	£35,000	£2,730,224	3 years	Cardiff University