



What is Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales?

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales is a partnership of universities, social enterprises, businesses, and policy partners who have come together to explore how research and innovation can help to find solutions to the challenges facing communities in rural Wales. Led by Aberystwyth University, Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales is one of four Local Policy and Innovation Partnerships commissioned by UKRI – the UK Government's research funding body – with others focused on regions in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Our core aims are to connect policy-making and development initiatives with relevant research and analysis, to improve access to data and fill evidence gaps, to test innovative solutions to tricky problems, and to build the capacity of communities in rural Wales to gather evidence and use research to address local concerns. The £5 million, 3-year project, which started in January 2024, engages a wide range of individuals and organisations from across rural Wales in a variety of activities.

The Challenge

Our work focuses on the ten predominantly rural local authority areas in Wales – Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey, Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, Powys and the Vale of Glamorgan – and extends to rural communities within other parts of Wales. This is a diverse region, but there are shared challenges around economic restructuring, limited employment opportunities, out-migration, housing affordability, and loss of local services. Conventional models for economic regeneration face obstacles from the dispersed population and absence of a dominant urban centre, the typically small size of businesses, limited endogenous capital, and poor infrastructure. One of our key questions is hence to ask 'what does growth look like in a rural region and how can it be nurtured?'. Growth also needs to be balanced with social, cultural and environmental wellbeing, including the sustainability of majority Welsh-speaking communities. New challenges are emerging from the climate crisis, including the need to manage the Net Zero transition and its demands on land and resources in the Welsh countryside in a fair and inclusive way.

There are numerous policies, projects and initiatives addressing these challenges, but they are disjointed, often short-term, and frequently find that the data they need to do their work effectively is out of date or missing. Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales will join the dots between existing projects, facilitate knowledge exchange and sharing good practice, integrate resources and fill gaps in the evidence base.

Our Vision and Themes

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales will put in place the foundation of research and innovation to support the realisation of a **Wellbeing Economy** in rural Wales, corresponding with one of the four missions of the Future Generations Commissioner in Wales. A Wellbeing Economy combines vibrant economic activities that provide jobs and good incomes for local residents with social justice for current and future generations on a healthy planet in which citizens are actively engaged in their communities. To help achieve this vision, the work of Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales is structured around four themes that have been identified with stakeholders:

- Building a Regenerative Economy
- Supporting the Net Zero Transition
- Enhancing Wellbeing in Place
- Empowering Communities for Cultural Recovery

Each theme has a linked **Thematic Group** made up of researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and community representatives, who meet three times a year. The Thematic Groups provide a forum for intelligence sharing and knowledge exchange, but also shape the Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales work programme by identifying evidence gaps and needs and proposing topics for research and analysis.

Our Work Programme

Guided by input from the Thematic Groups, the work programme of Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales is organised and delivered through seven Work Streams:

Innovation Labs aim to develop and test innovative solutions to overcome obstacles to change. The four Labs, one for each theme, involve stakeholder participants in a series of workshops to identify goals, discuss obstacles and explore potential solutions. One intervention per Lab will be selected for testing with a partner over a 12 month period and evaluated.

Community-led Action Research will equip rural communities to gather and analyse evidence to address locally-identified policy challenges and needs. Working with an assigned academic mentor, community participants will design and carry out a research project on an issue of their choosing, collecting and analysing data and agreeing follow-on actions. Initially focused on five pilot communities in Corwen, Newtown, Trawsfynydd, north Pembrokeshire, and the Dyfi estuary area, lessons will be shared through a new Community Research Network and 10 further projects selected through an open competition.

Responsive Research will support policy-making and implementation by undertaking short targeted studies of emerging issues proposed by the Thematic Groups. Half of these will be completed by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales researchers and half commissioned from external experts.

Data Synergy, Analysis and Mapping will strengthen the evidence base for policy-makers and practitioners by integrating existing data resources, mapping and visualising data to improve accessibility, conducting new bespoke analysis of Census and other data on key issues, and creating an Online Integrated Evidence Hub for Rural Wales as a one-stop resource.

Surveys will update data and fill evidence gaps by collecting new data through a series of online surveys including a large survey of 4,000 households in rural Wales; a rural business survey; a survey of community facilities, assets and initiatives; a rural crime survey; and a survey of young people in rural Wales.

Public Engagement, Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building will connect our research and innovation activities with a variety of audiences. Key activities include a series of four 'Dialogues' involving stakeholders and community representatives to work towards consensus solutions for 'wicked issues' for

rural policy in Wales, informed by evidence collected in the LPIP work programme; annual events at the National Eisteddfod and the Royal Welsh Show; online and in-person panels, workshops, talks and seminars; and capacity-building workshops for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners on topics such as using evidence in policy or engaging communities.

Evaluation and Learning will develop understanding of how evidence is used in policy and practice, identify and share examples of good practice, reflect on lessons learned from the experimental elements of Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales, and evaluate our impact.

Cutting across these Work Streams is a core principle of inclusivity. We want the work of Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales to respond to the interests and needs of diverse groups living in rural Wales and to be of benefit to everyone. To support this ambition, **Equalities and Inclusivity Mainstreaming** will encourage and equip our team to embed thinking about equalities and inclusion in all our activities as well as running workshops with conventionally marginalised or under-represented groups to facilitate their input into the Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales work programme and to support individuals to participate in the Thematic Groups or Innovation Labs.

Who We Are

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales is directed by Professor Michael Woods working with a core team of 17 academic researchers from Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Cardiff University, and the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) at the University of Gloucestershire, along with post-doctoral research associates, innovation managers, a community research facilitator, and professional support staff. Experts from the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) and Together for Change lead our work on Innovation Labs and Community-led Action Research respectively, and partners Represent Us Rural and Sgema support our inclusivity and engagement work. Our Thematic Groups are co-convened by practitioners from partners Antur Cymru, Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig (DEG), Pontio, and Rural Health and Care Wales.

Beyond these core delivery partners, our work is supported by Strategic Partners including Ambition North Wales, Growing Mid Wales, Natural Resources Wales, One Voice Wales, Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations, and the Welsh Local Government Association. In our pilot community research projects we are working with local partners including Dyfi Biosphere Partnership, Severn Wye Energy, South Denbighshire Community Partnership, and Tir Canol.

For more information

Contact: Professor Michael Woods m.woods@aber.ac.uk

Temporary website: <https://www.arsyllfa.cymru/cymru-wledig-lpip-rural-wales-phase-two/>

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