

Consultation Response: Innovation strategy for Wales – submitted on the 28. 9. 2022

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About Learning Disability Wales

Learning Disability Wales is a national charity representing the learning disability sector in Wales. We work with people with a learning disability and their families, Welsh Government, local authorities, disabled people's organisations and the voluntary sector to create a better Wales for all people with a learning disability.

Q1: What would you like the Innovation Strategy to achieve in the short (1 year) term in relation to:

- economic growth
- skills development
- social equity
- climate and environment
- other

We know that people with a learning disability, and indeed disabled people in general, have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic and are now going to be struggling disproportionately with the effects of the cost of living crisis. In order for these challenges to be addressed we need to prioritise the needs of these groups immediately. Within the first year of the strategy, it is important that people with a learning disability themselves are included in developing and commissioning innovation in order to address these issues. Innovation can play an important role in this, but we believe that the strategy will struggle to deliver this goal, for reasons elaborated further down.

Q2. What would you like the Innovation Strategy to achieve in the medium (2 to 5 years) term

More long-term we would like to see accessibility integrated into every aspect of society in Wales. This includes accessible training, apprenticeships and generally, equal opportunity in education. This also means having specific measures integrated into every stage of innovation to make sure that people from all backgrounds and different protected characteristics can have significant impact in the process.

Q3. What would you like the Innovation Strategy to achieve in the long (5+ years) term in relation to:

- economic growth
- skills development
- social equity
- climate and environment
- other

Q7. *Which aspects of the Innovation Strategy should remain the same?*

We are very happy to see a strong focus on digital inclusion in this proposal, including a concrete plan to address the reasons people struggle to connect digitally. We are particularly happy to see the issue of data poverty addressed and the need to build solid digital infrastructure across Wales.

The following is in answer to questions 11 and 14

Q11. An equal Wales is an objective of the Innovation Strategy. This proposes a transparent innovation ecosystem that ensures inclusivity in all research, development and innovation activity and a fairer distribution of investment where all regions in Wales feel the benefit from increased innovation activities.

a. Do you believe the proposed Innovation Strategy has set out clear objectives to achieve these outcomes? If not, what is missing?

Q14. The new Innovation Strategy wants to achieve a healthier Wales through a more coherent and aligned innovation ecosystem that targets new and different ways of working, supports recovery strategies from the pandemic and enables greater adoption of innovation.

This will be underpinned by a health and social care system that collaborates across industry, academia and the third sector to deliver improved healthcare value by developing, sharing, procuring and adopting innovative practice and technology.

Do you believe the strategy will support this ambition?

We are happy to see a strong focus in improving social care and health. However, in order to address the issues arising in these areas effectively there are two main issues that must be addressed.

1. What is innovative research?

Throughout this document there is a very strong focus on STEM research. While furthering STEM research is a good goal it is important to value different forms of research and innovation too.

This is especially important if Welsh Government wants to further innovation in the social care sector. An important principle of the disability rights movement is “nothing about us without us”. In this spirit it is important to give qualitative, participatory and co-produced research at least the same weight as quantitative methods and natural sciences. One thing that is noticeable in the proposal is that there is a strong focus on medical research and on aiding the “Covid Reset”. You write that:

“Investments in research will produce innovations that make real differences to health outcomes and to the lives of patients and people in our communities. In addition, research across both academia and industry (pharmaceuticals, medical devices, diagnostics and medical information technology sectors) creates new products and services that bring high value jobs and prosperity to our economy. Research can make our health and care services more effective, efficient and productive, improving care and saving and reinvesting resources.”

We are concerned that there is already an overreliance on research that is focused on eradicating impairments while there is not enough funding put into research that explores how disabled people can live happier and more fulfilled lives. Following the social model of disability, it is important to realise that much of what is experienced as disability does not stem from an impairment or difference that a person might have, but from the world not being accessible to them. We need urgent innovation in how to make Wales a more accessible country, especially given the setbacks in accessibility and disability rights of the last three years. For this it is vital that more money is put into research that explores the lived experiences of disabled people

across Wales that will lead to important innovations on how to make Wales a more accessible, equitable and fairer place.

2. Private business is not suitable for everything

There is a strong focus in this policy for cooperation with the private sector and private companies. We would like some acknowledgment that this is not a suitable approach for all areas. [Welsh Government has acknowledged this](#) to some degree through its plans to ban private care providers from providing services for looked after children in Wales. There is research and innovation that needs to happen that does not have a commercial interest and use, especially in terms of how to support disability rights better. It would be good to have this limitation acknowledged in the strategy.

Q19. Which stakeholder group would you consider yourself to represent:

- research organisations/ academic institutions
- private sector
- citizen
- third sector
- community group
- public sector
- Other (please specify):

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: