



# CYMDEITHAS DDYSGEDIG CYMRU THE LEARNED SOCIETY OF WALES

## Research Project Proposal:

### Understanding the Needs of Early and Mid-Career Researchers Across Wales

**Project Summary:** To conduct a comprehensive national survey in Wales to explore how researchers self-identify at early and mid-career stages, the challenges they face, and the types of support they need, in comparison with both the support they currently access and the wider provision available to them. The project findings will help shape targeted support (particularly for Mid-Career Researchers), identify areas for potential collaborative action across the Welsh research landscape, and capture how researchers view their future careers, including whether they plan to stay in academia or continue working in research in Wales or elsewhere.

**Contract type:** Freelance

**Fee:** Up to £16,000 (inclusive of VAT if applicable). A separate budget of up to £1000 is available for associated expenses e.g. workshop costs.

**Project start date:** The project will be awarded w/c 8 June 2026.

**Completion deadline:** Friday 8 January 2027

**Contract duration and time commitment:** We anticipate the project will require at least a 0.5FTE time commitment over a 7-month period. However, the project fee is on the basis of project completion (see section 4), not hours worked, therefore the hours and pattern of work can be determined by the applicant (although fortnightly update meetings are a requirement – see section 6).

**Deadline for applications:** 27 May 2026

## Project Proposal

### 1. Background and Rationale

The research ecosystem in Wales is diverse, encompassing a wide range of disciplines, institutions, and research career pathways, including within universities, public and private organisations more widely, and third sector/community settings. While significant attention has been given to Early Career Researchers (ECRs), the distinct needs and identities of Mid-Career Researchers (MCRs) remain underexplored (including also the separateness of their needs and identities from those of 'Established



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Researchers' as the next tier up)<sup>1</sup>. Both ECRs and MCRs are critical to the sustainability and progression of research in Wales.

This project, commissioned by the Learned Society of Wales (LSW), will conduct a comprehensive national survey to explore how researchers self-identify at these career stages, the challenges they face, and the types of support they currently access. It will also map gaps in provision, with a view to shaping targeted support particularly for MCRs and identifying areas for potential collaborative action across the research landscape for the benefit of Wales' researcher and researched communities and beyond.

## 2. Aims and Objectives

### Primary Aim:

To assess and understand the experiences, identities, and needs of ECRs and MCRs across Wales, to shape targeted interventions offered by the LSW Researcher Development Programme, as well as inform wider discussions and initiatives seeking to promote a healthy, inclusive, and sustainable research ecosystem for the benefit of Wales more widely.

Alongside the survey, the project will include a structured gap analysis of existing provision for researcher development across Wales and the wider UK research ecosystem. This will ensure that findings on perceived needs and experiences can be interpreted in the context of what support is already available to ECRs and MCRs.

### Objectives:

1. To explore how researchers across Wales define and self-identify as ECRs and MCRs.

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions of Mid-Career Researchers (MCRs) are inconsistent, with no clear agreement on how many years post-PhD or within a role qualify. While some definitions emphasise a level of establishment—such as a track record of publications, reputation, research independence and emerging research leadership—others place less weight on these markers. MCRs are typically positioned between the postdoctoral stage and professorship, though these boundaries are fluid. A common theme is transition: MCRs are often developing research leadership capacity and/or establishing independence. There is also no consensus on terminology, with some avoiding “mid-career” due to ambiguous connotations, opting instead for alternatives like “evolving” or “established” researchers.

In contrast, definitions such as those used by Wellcome Trust for Late Career Researchers are generally clearer and more stable, typically referring to individuals with sustained, internationally recognised research leadership, significant funding track records, and established influence in their field. Compared to this, MCR definitions are more transitional and less standardised, reflecting a stage characterised by progression toward—rather than attainment of—such seniority and stability.



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2. To identify the challenges faced by ECRs and MCRs in progressing their careers.
3. To identify perceived gaps in support across organisations and disciplines, and among independent researchers.
4. To assess the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of current support mechanisms and development opportunities.
5. To gather insights on the types of resources and interventions that could be embedded in the LSW Researcher Development Programme and shared for the benefit of Wales' research and other communities more widely.
6. To produce actionable recommendations for the LSW and key stakeholders to collaboratively enhance research culture and support the provision of researcher development opportunities for ECRs and MCRs.

### **3. Proposed Research Project Structure**

The following will be discussed and adapted with the appointed postholder but a written update to the LSW lead at the end of each phase is required. Timelines will also be discussed and confirmed with the successful postholder.

Phase 1: Survey and Sample Design/Construction, Piloting and Obtaining Ethical Clearance.

Phase 2: Gap analysis of existing provision for ECRs and MCRs across Wales and the wider UK. An indicative list of known opportunities will be provided by LSW to inform the initial scope of the work. The post holder will conduct a systematic desk-based review and mapping of provision.

Phase 3: Survey Distribution to researchers within universities, public and private organisations more widely, and third sector/community settings. LSW will provide a list of stakeholders, including its own ECR Network and the Welsh Universities Research Leadership Programme. However, the post holder will identify and create further links to ensure the survey sample is as representative as possible.

Phase 4: Data Analysis

Phase 5: Stakeholder Engagement and Validation

Phase 6: Reporting and Recommendations



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## 4. Outcomes and deliverables

The research project will provide LSW Researcher Development Staff with the following:

- A **clearer understanding** of how researchers at different stages self-identify and navigate their careers in Wales, and how their experiences might vary across demographic groups.
- **Evidence-based recommendations defining** and delineating the boundaries of **MCR status**, including possible practical classification criteria across career stages.
- **Evidence base** for the unique needs of ECR and MCRs to inform the LSW's Researcher Development offer, and to contribute to relevant national and international discussions on a sustainable research ecosystem.
- A **gap analysis report** mapping existing provision and **identifying gaps in support for researchers in Wales**, alongside opportunities for institutional and national collaboration informed by **comparative analysis** with survey findings.
- The possibility to **strengthen engagement** between LSW and the broader research community across Wales.
- **Insights about career development and research culture** to be shared with relevant stakeholders in Wales and the UK.

Based on the above, the role holder will be expected to produce a comprehensive **final report with key findings, learning points and actionable recommendations** and develop a **policy brief and infographic summary** for wider dissemination.

## 5. Project Team

- **Lead Organisation:** Learned Society of Wales
- **Project Lead:** Independent Researcher / Freelancer
- **LSW Staff Commissioning the project:** LSW Researcher Development team, led by Barbara Ibinarriaga Soltero, Programme Manager
- **Stakeholders:** LSW Researcher Development Advisory Group, LSW Fellows, Medr, Welsh Ethnic Minority Professors Initiative (WEMPI), and Wales Innovation Network (WIN).

## 6. Budget and location

Up to £16,000 (inclusive of VAT) is available for the project.



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The role can be undertaken primarily remotely. However, the role holder will be expected to participate in regular (approx. 4-6 weekly) in-person meetings at LSW's offices in Cardiff (expenses for this will not be covered by LSW).

A designated budget of £1,000 is available to cover additional in-person engagements that may be required e.g. to attend the LSW's annual ECR Colloquium (Aberystwyth, 29 and 30 June 2026) and any other costs to directly support their work. Additional funding can be sought if a strong case is made.

The role holder will be expected to use their own IT equipment.

## 7. How to apply

Submit a CV and covering letter (maximum 2 pages) to [applications@wales.ac.uk](mailto:applications@wales.ac.uk) by **Wednesday 27 May**. We expect to hold interviews online on Friday 5 June.

Please include the following in your cover letter:

- Describe your expertise and experience relevant to the research topic, including details of relevant publications or other work.
- Provide an indicative timetable for the research, including your start date and the project completion date of **Friday 8 January 2027**.
- Provide your fee (based on your own time).
- Briefly outline any anticipated risks to the successful completion of the project and mitigation measures.
- Please also include a brief statement outlining your approach to research ethics and data protection, including how you ensure compliance with relevant regulations (e.g. GDPR) when working independently.

If you have any questions relating to this opportunity, please contact the Hiring Manager, Dr Barbara Ibinarriaga Soltero ([bibinarriagasoltero@lsw.wales.ac.uk](mailto:bibinarriagasoltero@lsw.wales.ac.uk)).