

**EARLY CAREER  
RESEARCHERS  
NETWORK**  
LEARNED SOCIETY OF WALES



**RHWYDWAITH  
YMCHWILWYR  
GYRFA CYNNAR**  
CYMDEITHAS DDYSGEDIG CYMRU

# EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS' COLLOQUIUM

29 - 30 June 2026, Aberystwyth University





## AGENDA, 29 JUNE 2026

|               |                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                   |                                                               |                        |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 11.30am       | Arrival and registration                                                                                           |                                                                                                   |                                                               |                        |
| 12pm-1pm      | Lunch and networking<br>MedRus 1 & Main Hall                                                                       |                                                                                                   |                                                               |                        |
| 1pm-2.15pm    | Welcome and keynote speech<br>MedRus Main Hall                                                                     |                                                                                                   |                                                               |                        |
| 2.15pm-2.30pm | Break                                                                                                              |                                                                                                   |                                                               |                        |
| 2.30pm-3.30pm | Flash talks<br>A More Equal Wales<br>MedRus4                                                                       | Flash talks<br>A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Language<br>MedRus 3                                | Flash talks<br>A Resilient Wales<br>MedRus Main Hall          | Quiet room<br>MedRus 2 |
| 3.30pm-4.00pm | Exhibitors and refreshments<br>MedRus 1                                                                            |                                                                                                   |                                                               |                        |
| 4.00pm-5.00pm | Career development workshop<br>Engaging with the UK Young Academy: pathways, people, and possibilities<br>MedRus 3 | Research culture workshop<br>Locally meaningful research using WFGA 'ways of working'<br>MedRus 4 | Interactive workshop<br>LEGO Serious Play<br>MedRus Main Hall | Quiet room<br>MedRus 2 |
| 5.00pm-5.15pm | Close of day 1<br>MedRus Main Hall                                                                                 |                                                                                                   |                                                               |                        |
| 5.30pm-7.00pm | ECR-led social activities                                                                                          |                                                                                                   |                                                               |                        |

A quiet room will be available in MedRus 2 from midday on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June until the end of the colloquium.



## AGENDA, 30 JUNE 2026

|                  |                                                                                                   |                                                             |                                                                                                 |                                           |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 8.45am-9.15am    | <b>Arrival, registration and activity</b><br>MedRus 1 & Main Hall                                 |                                                             |                                                                                                 |                                           |
| 9.15am-10.15am   | <b>Flash talks</b><br><br>A Wales of cohesive communities*<br><br>MedRus4                         | <b>Flash talks</b><br><br>A healthier Wales<br><br>MedRus 3 | <b>Flash talks</b><br><br>Wales, the economy, and emerging technologies<br><br>MedRus Main Hall | <b>Quiet room</b><br><br><br><br>MedRus 2 |
| 10.15am-10.30am  | <b>Break</b>                                                                                      |                                                             |                                                                                                 |                                           |
| 10.30am-11.15am  | <b>Poster competition</b><br><br>MedRus Main Hall                                                 |                                                             |                                                                                                 |                                           |
| 11.15am-12.30pm  | <b>Lunch</b><br><br>MedRus 1 & Main Hall                                                          |                                                             |                                                                                                 |                                           |
| 12.30pm - 2.00pm | <b>Panel discussion: navigating engagement beyond academia as an ECR*</b><br><br>MedRus Main Hall |                                                             |                                                                                                 |                                           |
| 2.00pm - 2.30pm  | <b>Award of Hywel Thomas ECR Prize</b><br><b>Closing remarks</b><br><br>MedRus Main Hall          |                                                             |                                                                                                 |                                           |

A quiet room will be available in MedRus 2 from midday on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June until the end of the colloquium.

\* Welsh language session with simultaneous translation into English.





**Olivia Harrison**

Chief Executive of Learned Society of Wales

We are once again delighted to welcome researchers from across Wales, and from a broad range of disciplines and sectors, to our fourth annual Learned Society of Wales' Early Career Researcher (ECR) Colloquium.

The university community here in Aberystwyth has given us tremendous support throughout the planning of this event. I thank the many Fellows of the Learned Society of Wales, here in Aberystwyth, who have given their time, especially our Cenhadon, Professor Rhys Jones and Professor Rattan Yadav, for their unfailing support. Huge thanks as well to Professor Helen Roberts and Professor Jon Timmis for their leadership and inspirational welcome and keynote speeches. A special mention must also go to the Aberystwyth ECR Network, under the leadership of Dr Hannah Vallin, who sits on our Researcher Development Advisory Group. They have been heavily involved in the organisation of this event, ensuring that the voice of the ECR was at the heart of every decision taken.

The work on researcher development is an integral part of the Learned Society of Wales' mission. The ECR Network, with its range of webinars and events, the wide range of grants we run, and the travel and expenses bursaries we now offer are all vital in helping to make Wales a great place to be a researcher.

That is why it is so exciting that this year sees the inaugural awarding of our new Hywel Thomas ECR Prize for Research Culture and Community Leadership. This acknowledges early career researchers in Wales who support their peers and, in so doing, create a more inclusive, supportive, and sustainable research environment for all.

That captures perfectly what the Learned Society of Wales seeks to achieve through its researcher development work. As part of that, today celebrates the fascinating and important research you are carrying out, here in Wales, while offering an opportunity to network, make new connections and develop the partnerships and knowledge exchange that help sustain a research career.

I hope you will continue to remain connected with us and our ECR Network beyond the Colloquium.



**Professor Jon Timmis FLSW**

Vice-Chancellor of Aberystwyth University

Developing a research career is not an easy thing to do. The pressures that are now placed upon all staff in universities are increasing, and often (sadly) time for research is squeezed. In this environment it is hard to balance research with other aspects of the roles that we hold. As a consequence, the pressure in particular on ECRs I don't think has ever been greater. In a turbulent sector, with pressures all around, we must remember the importance of research, how it supports our missions as universities, and importantly how best to support, develop and celebrate those that undertake, support and deliver research - in particular those who are starting on their journeys and are of course, the future of our sector.

**Biography:** Professor Jon Timmis took up the position of Vice-Chancellor of Aberystwyth University on 1st January 2024. Jon is a previous recipient of a Royal Society-Wolfson Research Merit Award and a Royal Academy of Engineering Enterprise Fellowship. Graduating in Computer Science from Aberystwyth University, Jon left following the completion of his PhD in computer science to become a lecturer at the University of Kent in 2000, moving to the University of York as a Reader in 2005. He was promoted to Professor in 2008. Following a period of Head of Department of the Electronic Engineering Department, he became Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Partnerships and Knowledge Exchange and then moved to University of Sunderland as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Commercial).

Jon's research is at the cross-over between computer science, maths, engineering and biology. Jon has developed new ways to modelling immune system response, with a focus on the reduction of the use of animals in research, which aided therapeutic design and treatments. He has also worked on various robotic systems, including swarm robotic and evolutionary robotic systems. His most recent work has been developing new software engineering approaches to modelling robotic hardware and software systems, with a focus on validation, and automatic code generation and model checking.



## **Travelling without a map: reflections on career navigation**

**Professor Helen Roberts FLSW**

Professor of Physical Geography & Director  
of Research Excellence and Impact,  
Aberystwyth University

Helen is a geographer and she has a confession: for most (perhaps all) of her professional career she has been travelling without a fixed destination in mind and with no career map in hand. Helen's keynote will argue that careers often deviate from the routes imagined, and so even if one did carry a map and plan a route it is still possible to find oneself in unfamiliar or unexpected terrain, or to fall off the edge of the map entirely. Drawing on her own personal experience, Helen will reflect on the roles of curiosity, serendipity, courage, and agency, in finding (or making) a career pathway, along with encounters with other travellers. She will suggest that rewarding pathways can still be found even when the way ahead is not always clear, and that getting a little bit lost or distracted or taking a wrong-turn can still add value to the journey.

### **Biography:**

Helen is a Professor in the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University, and co-Director of Aberystwyth Luminescence Research Laboratory, where she addresses key questions regarding the timing, pace, and implications of past climate and environmental change. This research involves collaborations across the world, including Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia.

Helen also holds a senior leadership role at Aberystwyth University as Director of Research Excellence and Impact, providing academic leadership for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission and supporting research and researchers across the University more broadly.

Helen contributes to the wider research community through various elected roles within external Learned Societies, including as one of 22 Voting Members of the international Subcommission of Quaternary Stratigraphy (SQS; 2024-present), Vice-President of the INQUA (International Union for Quaternary Research) Commission on Stratigraphy & Chronology (SACCOM; 2019-present), and founding Member of the International Luminescence and ESR dating Association (ILEDAs; 2023-present). She also serves as Vice-President of the UK Quaternary Research Association (QRA), and as a member of the Learned Society of Wales' Fellowship Committee.

Beyond her working life, Helen is mother to a 14 year old son, a keen amateur cake creator, and a gardener with a necessarily strong Darwinian streak.





MedRus 4, 29 June 2.30pm - 3.30pm

Chair: Aiswarya Girija

## FLASH TALKS: A MORE EQUAL WALES

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### **How can strategic HRM address neurodivergent people's hiring barriers?**

Alex Markovits, Cardiff University



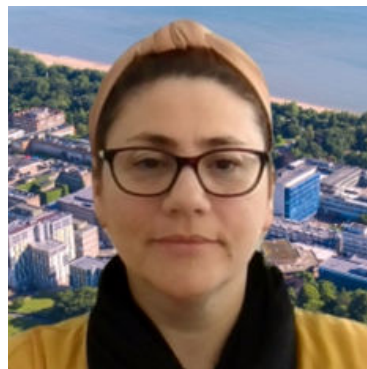
### **Research in action: addressing educational inequality for care-experienced children in Wales**

Emily Lowthian, Swansea University



### **Teachers' expectations and children's aspirations: understanding inequalities in life chances**

Balaussa Shaimakhanova, Swansea University



### **Cross-cultural challenges to young children's agency and participation in ECPLC**

Giselle Tur Porres, Swansea University

Michelle Brinn, Swansea University



### **Equality for all? Neurodivergent staff experiences in higher education**

Gwennan Hâf Barton, Wrexham University



MedRus 3, 29 June 2.30pm - 3.30pm

Chair: Elena Anna Spagnuolo

## FLASH TALKS: A WALES OF VIBRANT CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

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### **Welsh farmers' hopes, concerns and their perspectives on climate & a just transition**

Sandy Stevens, Aberystwyth University



### **Assessing the economic impacts of the arts sector in Wales**

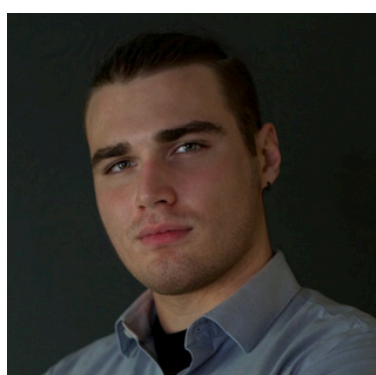
Jacob Rees Davies, Bangor University



### **Anyone but England: constructing Welsh identity through rugby communities**

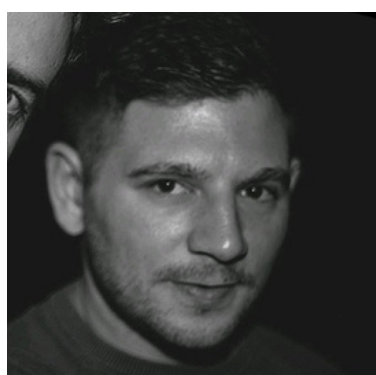
Betsan Doyle, Cardiff University

Alec Hurley, Cardiff Metropolitan University



### **AI's impact on the future of the Welsh language**

Hunter Chasens, Aberystwyth University



### **Facilitating community dialogue around usage of and access to shared user pathways**

Matthew Edward Howell, Swansea University





MedRus Main Hall 29 June 2.30pm - 3.30pm

Chair: Jule Neumann

## FLASH TALKS: A RESILIENT WALES

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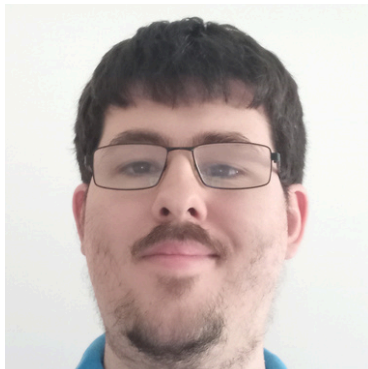
### **Microplastic pollution: science-based solutions for resilient ecosystems**

Winnie Courtene-Jones, Bangor University



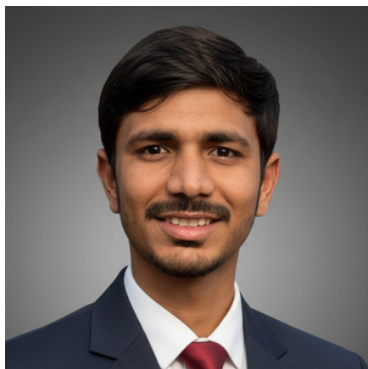
### **What's on the menu? Investigating dolphin diets in Cardigan Bay**

Hannah Vallin, Aberystwyth University



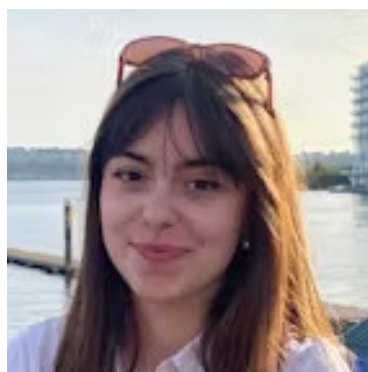
### **Studying snail ecology to prevent parasitic infections in livestock**

Christopher Smith, Aberystwyth University



### **Towards identifying the key variables influencing lodging in tef (Eragrostis tef)**

Hardik Patel, Aberystwyth University



### **'Un, dau, trees!': initial findings on Welsh tree-planting and environmental nationalism**

Morgane Dirion, Cardiff University



## ENGAGING WITH THE UK YOUNG ACADEMY: PATHWAYS, PEOPLE, AND POSSIBILITIES

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The UK Young Academy (UKYA) is an interdisciplinary network of early-career researchers and professionals from across the UK. Members are selected through a competitive process and contribute to work on research culture, policy, and public engagement alongside their main roles. This session introduces the UKYA's purpose, structure, and expectations of members. It will outline what the Academy does, how members are selected, and how participation fits alongside academic and non-academic careers.

The session will include short case studies from current UKYA members working across health, the humanities, and the sciences. These will focus on why they applied, what they do as members, and how involvement has shaped their work and perspectives. A panel discussion will address the application process in practical terms, including eligibility, assessment criteria, and common misconceptions. Attendees will have the opportunity to ask questions about whether UKYA is a good fit for their career stage and interests. The session is aimed at early-career researchers who are considering applying to the UKYA or who want a clearer understanding of its role within the UK research landscape.

### Panellists:



**Dr Emily Lowthian**

**Swansea University, School of Social Sciences**

Emily Lowthian researches how societal factors like inequality, family life, and social media impact young people's health and education. With a background in data science, she uses advanced statistics to tackle social issues and supports staff and students in developing essential data skills.



**Dr Sarah-Jane Dunlop-Potts**

**Swansea University, Department of Mechanical Engineering**

Sarah-Jane's research focusses on using additive manufacturing, in the form of printing and coating methods including screen-printing, to develop novel energy and sensing solutions, with a circular economy approach. She holds an EngD in Materials Engineering and a MEng in Product Design Engineering.



## LOCALLY MEANINGFUL RESEARCH USING WFGA WAYS OF WORKING

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How can researchers balance pressures to deliver impact and outputs with an ethical responsibility to local contexts, relationships, and lived experience? This workshop uses the Well-being of Future Generations Act's Ways of Working to prompt critical reflection on research practice, drawing on a real case exploring how deprived coastal communities engage with their local environment. Together, we will examine what it means to pursue meaningful change from within historically extractive systems and during a period of financial constraint. Rather than offering fixed solutions, the session invites early-career researchers to consider how to embed the Ways of Working in everyday research.

Tom works at the Local Challenges Research Office, a facility that is designed to promote relational, ethical community-led research practices. We have been developing an approach to this kind of work for over 3 years and have a wide portfolio of locally meaningful research projects that are iteratively demonstrating the value of the approach.

The workshop will be designed to be fully accessible and supportive for all participants. The facilitator will use clear language, offer multiple ways of contributing (spoken, written, or anonymous), and ensure activities allow for different comfort levels and communication styles. The session structure will include pauses for reflection and questions. As the workshop touches on issues of deprivation and extractive research practices, participants will be encouraged to agree on ground rules for respectful dialogue, emphasise voluntary sharing, and create a psychologically safe space where participants can engage critically without judgement. These follow the principles for co-production that Local Challenges Research Office developed internally and follow routinely.

### Panellist:



#### **Dr Tom Avery**

#### **Local Challenges Research Office, Swansea University**

Tom Avery's research sits at the intersection of communities, policy, and academia. Through the Local Challenges Research Office (LCRO), he helps develop research partnerships that begin with local priorities rather than predetermined academic agendas.

Over the last three years, he has worked with community groups, public bodies, and policymakers on projects relating to political trust, access to the coast, regional well-being, and school-community relationships. Tom is particularly interested in what happens when ambitious ideas about co-production, place-based working, and social impact encounter the realities of contemporary higher education. His work explores how researchers can build meaningful long-term relationships despite short-term contracts, funding uncertainty, and growing institutional pressures, and what this means for the future role of universities in their regions.





MedRus Main Hall | 4.00pm - 5.00pm, 29 June

Interactive workshop

## BOOST YOUR RESEARCH SUPERPOWERS WITH LEGO SERIOUS PLAY

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This session will provide a hands-on introduction to LEGO Serious Play, a method for engaging people, getting them thinking differently and having a different conversation. It will introduce the core principles of the approach, and participants will have a chance to build and share LEGO models to experience the method for themselves.

As a theme for the session, we will focus on our current research strengths - and what actions we might take to boost our research skills further. The session will also encourage reflection on how purposeful play can add value - and fun! - to research, teaching and the organisational and societal contexts that we work in.

### Panellist:



**Dr Anwen Elias**

**Reader in Politics, Aberystwyth University**

Anwen is a political scientist with research expertise in devolution and constitutional change, Welsh politics and elections, and participatory and deliberative democracy. Her work increasingly focuses on using creative and visual methodologies to include different voices, create new connections, and enable deeper thinking. As an experienced LEGO Serious Play facilitator, she's interested in changing how we typically gather and communicate in academic, policy and community spaces.



MedRus 4 | 9.15am - 10.15am, 30 June

Chair: Laura Jones

## FLASH TALKS: A WALES OF COHESIVE COMMUNITIES



### Exploring perspectives on parental partnerships within Early Years (Mudiad Meithrin) settings

Michelle Brinn, Swansea University



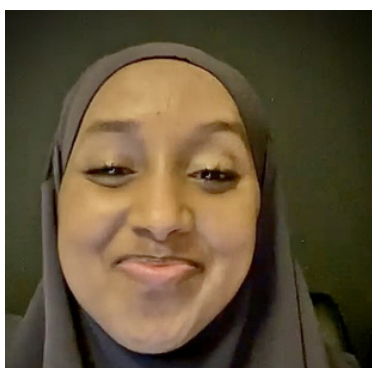
### Ydy addysg rithiol yn ddigon? Astudiaeth ar Gymraeg i oedolion (Is virtual learning enough? A study on Welsh for adults)

Emma Grigorian, Cardiff Metropolitan University



### Plismona bregusrwydd mewn ardaloedd gwledig: llywodraetholdeb, gofal a rheolaeth (Policing vulnerability in rural areas: governance, care and management)

Demi John, Aberystwyth University



### A letter to consultation: challenging 'hard to reach' narratives through lived experience and participatory research

Mymuna Soleman, Privilege Café



### Who shapes places? Community voice in matters that affect them

Tom Avery, Swansea University



### Medr, ei rôl mewn ymchwil, a'r Cynllun Cenedlaethol ar gyfer y Gymraeg mewn addysg drydyddol (Medr, its role in research, and the National Plan for the Welsh language in tertiary education)

Bedwyr ab Ion Thomas, Medr





MedRus 3 | 9.15am - 10.15am, 30 June

Chair: Hannah Rees

## FLASH TALKS: A HEALTHIER WALES

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### **Co-development of an evaluation toolkit for nature-based social prescribing in Wales**

Menna Brown, Swansea University



### **DNA's cousin RNA is dysregulated in diseases causing dementia**

Jamie McDonald, Cardiff University



### **Sustainable processes to enhance nutrition and quality of cereal-based foods**

Aiswarya Girija, Aberystwyth University



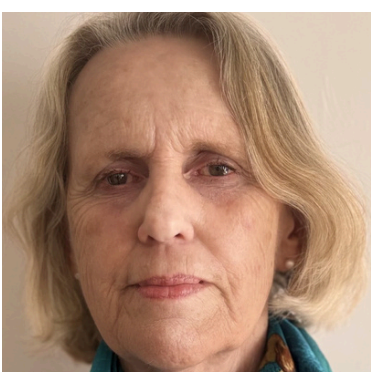
### **Rural health issues or health issues in rural areas**

Thomas Wilson, Aberystwyth University



### **School factors associated with student conduct problems in Wales**

Nicole Gelfert, Cardiff University



### **Public service interpreting in healthcare for language equity in Wales**

Judy Murray, Cardiff University





MedRus Main Hall | 9.15am - 10.15am, 30 June

Chair: Yasir Saleem Shaikh

## FLASH TALKS: WALES, THE ECONOMY, AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

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### **The AI ease illusion: GenAI policy and work underestimation**

Jishnu Bhattacharyya, Swansea University



### **Regional variation in AI-Generated responses about Conwy Castle**

Dmitrii Iarovoi, Wrexham University



### **International students' academic success in the era of AI**

Yixin Wang-Taylor, Bangor University



### **Can blockchain encourage more responsible consumption?**

Sharad Gupta, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Navriti Gupta, University of South Wales



### **Implementation of the supply chain due diligence in food retail**

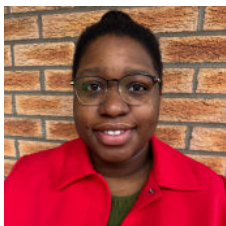
Arpu Kumar, University of Wales Trinity Saint David



MedRus Main Hall | 30 June 10.30am - 11.15am

## RESEARCH POSTER EXHIBITION

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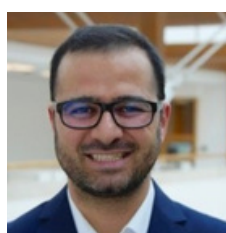
### **Testing fatty acids to build a tumour model**

Ayomide Adekanye, Cardiff University



### **“Party trick”: multilingual adolescents’ and young adults’ experiences and emotions**

Kaisa Pankakoski, Cardiff University



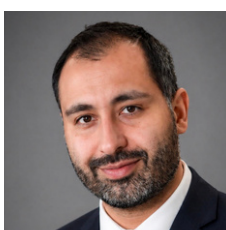
### **Digital learning companions’ impact on engagement and employability in Welsh business education**

Elan Kandaswamy and Sanar Muhyaddin, Wrexham University



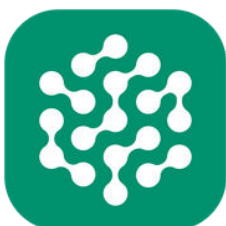
### **Reflections on the community focused schools manager role in Wales**

Lisa Formby, Wrexham University



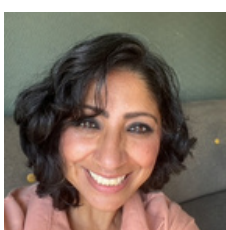
### **Decarbonise the concrete industry by recycling battery-grade lithium mining waste**

Mehdi Chougan



### **Understanding historical and contemporary population processes in *galba truncatula***

Chijioke Marvin Obilom, Aberystwyth University



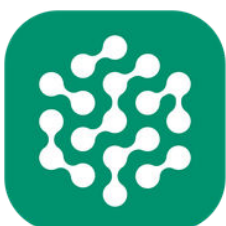
### **Leading responsibly in a data & AI-driven age**

Harvinder Johal, Wildbrain



### **Hidden heat on the street: street level heat from restaurant exhaust**

Li Yin



### **Agri-technological innovation for the development of resilient and sustainable food systems**

Jianhao Yang, Cardiff University



MedRus Main Hall, 30 June 10.30am - 11.15am

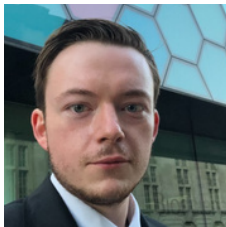
## RESEARCH POSTER EXHIBITION

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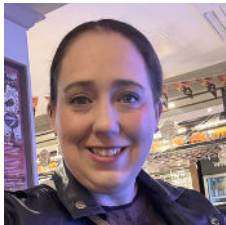
**Using artificial intelligence (AI) to help support armed forces veterans' mental health.**

Juan Fernando Maestre, Swansea University



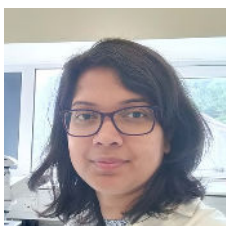
**Targeddu proteinau er mwyn trin clefydau prin (Targeting proteins to treat rare diseases)**

Ellis Evan Jones, Cardiff University



**What do students make of GenAI after an educational intervention?**

Natalie Tina Roch, Wrexham University



**Perennial ryegrass as a feedstock for microbial protein**

Valerie Rodrigues, Aberystwyth University





MedRus Main Hall | 12.30pm - 2.00pm, 30 June

## PANEL DISCUSSION: NAVIGATING ENGAGEMENT BEYOND ACADEMIA AS AN ECR

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The discussion will focus on experiences of engaging with audiences, partners, and stakeholders beyond academia, highlighting practical insights, opportunities, challenges, and lessons learned that may benefit researchers looking to broaden the impact of their work.

### Chair:

**Professor Rhys Jones FLSW**, Professor of Human Geography, Aberystwyth University

### Panellists:



**Professor Hazel Davey FLSW,**  
**Professor of Biology, Aberystwyth University**

Professor Hazel Davey is a graduate of Aberystwyth University with a BSc in Zoology and Microbiology and a PhD on Flow Cytometry of Microorganisms. Her research focuses on Baker's yeast, which is widely used in food manufacture, brewing, biotechnology and as a model organism in academic research.



**Professor Mary-Ann Constantine FLSW,**  
**Professor of Celtic Studies at the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies**

Mary-Ann Constantine studies the literature and history of Romantic-period Wales: her interests in travel writing, industrial landscapes and the cultural politics of the 1790s combine in a recent publication, *Curious Travellers: Writing the Welsh Tour 1760-1820* (Oxford, 2024). She has led two major AHRC-funded projects under the title *Curious Travellers: Thomas Pennant and the Welsh and Scottish Tour 1760-1820*, and co-led the European-funded Ireland-Wales project, *Ports, Past and Present*. She is currently Co-Chair of the Wales Arts and Humanities Alliance.



**Dr Rachel Cross PhD FHEA MInstP**  
**Assistant Faculty Pro Vice Chancellor, Aberystwyth University**

Dr Rachel Cross is a Senior Lecturer in Physics, graduating in 2006 with a BSc in Physics from Aberystwyth. She joined the Ministry of Defence's graduate scheme and worked on several high-profile nuclear projects. She then moved to the civil nuclear industry as a Nuclear Safety Engineer and Reactor Physicist. Missing research, she returned to Aberystwyth to complete her PhD in 2015. Her research interests are interdisciplinary, currently focused on the use of nanodiamonds for drug delivery. She is active in her professional body, the Institute of Physics, as an elected member on the Wales, Women in Physics, and Awards Committees.



**Steffan James**  
**Doctoral Student, Cardiff University**

Steffan is a final-year PhD researcher investigating the unintended consequences of actions in sustainable supply chain management. His research explores how the goods and services that underpin modern society can be delivered without adverse ecological, social, or economic impacts. Before entering academia, he spent a decade in the manufacturing industry working on telecommunications satellites, medical devices, and renewable energy.



MedRus Main Hall | 2.00pm - 2.30pm, 30 June

## CLOSING REMARKS

## HYWEL THOMAS ECR PRIZE ANNOUNCEMENT

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### **The Hywel Thomas ECR Prize for Research Culture and Community Leadership**

The Hywel Thomas Prize celebrates Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in Wales who support other ECRs and contribute to a more inclusive, supportive, and sustainable research environment. It was established in 2026 to mark the end of Professor Hywel Thomas' six years as President of the Learned Society of Wales.

The prize recognises Professor Thomas' leadership and values, reflecting a commitment to research culture that is not only excellent, but also fair, collaborative, and people-centred. During his time as President of the Learned Society of Wales, Professor Thomas championed early career researchers and supported work to strengthen equality, diversity and inclusion, recognising that thriving research communities depend on the ability of all individuals to participate and succeed.

The prize is being awarded for the first time at this year's ECR Colloquium in Aberystwyth.



### **Professor Hywel Thomas**

Professor Hywel Thomas was the third President of the Learned Society of Wales (2020 - 2026).

An internationally recognised researcher, he is the founder of the Geoenvironmental Research Centre at Cardiff University and a Distinguished Research Professor at Swansea University. He served as a Bevan Commissioner, providing independent expert advice to the Welsh Government on innovation and improvement in health and social care in Wales. He also led FLEXIS, a £24 million project for energy systems research in Wales. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS), a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering (FREng), and a Member of Academia Europaea, the Academy of Europe.

In 2017 he received a CBE for services to academic research and higher education. In 2021, he was elected as a foreign member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the highest honour bestowed by the Chinese government to a foreign scientist for contributions and achievements in science and technology. In 2025, Professor Thomas received the Chinese Government Friendship Award, for his 'important contribution to China's socialist modernisation as well as exchanges and cooperation with other countries.'





## ECR COLLOQUIUM COMMITTEE

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**Dr Hannah Vallin**

**Postdoctoral Research Assistant, IBERS, Aberystwyth University**

Dr Hannah Vallin is a multidisciplinary researcher specialising in DNA metabarcoding and environmental DNA (eDNA) for ecological and biodiversity research. Following her PhD on herbivore dietary analysis, she has held postdoctoral research assistant positions at Aberystwyth University spanning terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Her work applies DNA-based approaches to better understand species interactions, ecosystem health, and biodiversity. Hannah is also Chair of the Aberystwyth University Early Career Researcher Committee, where she supports initiatives that foster inclusivity, collaboration, mentorship, and professional development for researchers across disciplines.



**Dr. Jule Neumann,**

**Chronobiologist, Department of Life Sciences, Aberystwyth University**

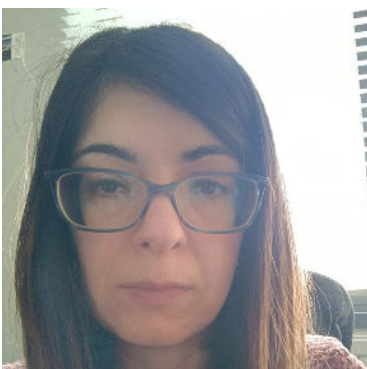
Jule is a marine chronobiologist and postdoctoral researcher at Aberystwyth University. Her research focuses on understanding how organisms keep track of time, with a particular focus on the influence of the tides and the moon on life in our oceans. She completed her PhD at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology in Plön, after which an independent early-career fellowship brought her from northern Germany to Wales.



**Dr Caitlin Baker**

**Lecturer in Psychology, Aberystwyth University**

Caitlin is a Lecturer in Psychology at Aberystwyth University. Her research explores various aspects of Confidence with Interracial Contact: investigating participants possessing or lacking the confidence to interact with racially/ethnically diverse people and how they discuss (or don't discuss!) racial topics. Additionally, she studies how this affects their desire to seek new interracial experiences and their ability to develop successful, positive friendships with racially/ethnically diverse people. Currently, she is investigating strategic colour blindness (SCB), a phenomenon in which people avoid discussing racial topics for fear of being seen as racist, with the intention to develop interventions to build confidence and skills.



**Dr Elena Anna Spagnuolo**

**Associate Lecturer and Italian Language Instructor, Aberystwyth University**

Elena Anna Spagnuolo works as an Associate Lecturer and Italian Language Instructor at Aberystwyth University. Her monograph *Voices of Women Writers. Using Language to Negotiate Identity in Transmigratory Contexts*, investigated the connection between writing, self-translating and the redefinition of identity in transmigratory contexts. In 2020, her research project, funded by the Centre for the Movement of People, explored the impact of Covid-19 on the transnational dimension of Italian migration to Wales. She is currently working on a project, funded by the British Academy Small Grants. It investigates an evacuation scheme for Italian children, that took place after World War II.





## ECR COLLOQUIUM COMMITTEE

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### **Dr Beatrice E. Ifie**

#### **Senior Researcher Fellow in Plant Breeding, IBERS, Aberystwyth University**

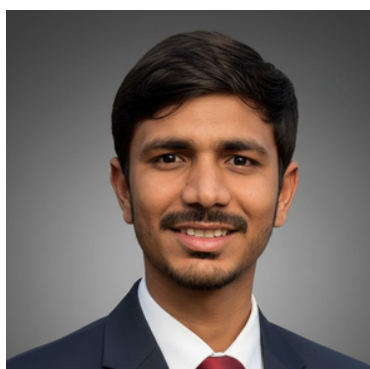
Beatrice leads the Miscanthus Breeding Programme at the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS), Aberystwyth University, where she applies innovative plant breeding technologies to accelerate genetic gains for improved yield, stress resilience, and quality traits. Her current research focuses on developing high-yielding, climate-resilient Miscanthus varieties to support sustainable agricultural systems. Her research focuses on advancing the understanding of Miscanthus biology, particularly by investigating the mechanisms underlying plant responses to abiotic stresses and diverse environments, to inform targeted breeding strategies. Beatrice has extensive university teaching experience and has played a key role in developing e-learning resources in Plant Breeding.



### **Ben Clarke**

#### **IBERS, Aberystwyth University**

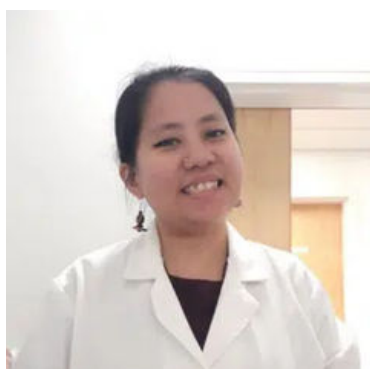
Ben is a doctoral researcher and early career ecologist at the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS), Aberystwyth University. His research takes a multidisciplinary approach to upland ecology, investigating the complex relationships between vegetation dynamics, peatland hydrology, wildfire regimes, and how land use and management can influence the resilience of these landscapes. As a member of the ECR Colloquium Committee for 2026, Ben hopes to contribute to the LSW's ongoing work in fostering networking and collaboration among early career researchers across Wales.



### **Hardik Harishchandra Patel**

#### **PhD Researcher in Biological Sciences, Aberystwyth University**

Hardik Harishchandra Patel is a PhD researcher in Biological Sciences at Aberystwyth University. His research focuses on lodging resistance in teff, with particular interest in stem biomechanics, lignin deposition and plant physiological responses. He has a strong academic background in plant breeding, genetics and crop improvement, with previous research experience in cotton and pulse crops. He is passionate about sustainable agriculture, innovative research methods and supporting the development of early career researchers through collaborative academic initiatives.



### **Tina Rai**

#### **PhD student, Aberystwyth University**

Tina Rai is a PhD student in Department of Life Sciences at Aberystwyth University. As a microbial ecologist, my research is based on understanding the microbiome of cryoconite (dark sediment found on the surface of glaciers or ice sheets) mostly from Arctic glaciers (Ny-Ålesund). My research focuses on the study of change in bacterial communities in Arctic glaciers as well as cryoconite formation. I have been a PhD representative of my department for 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years then ECR departmental representative for 2024/25. These roles helped me to deliver the issues faced by fellow PhD students to respective department.



## ECR COLLOQUIUM COMMITTEE

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### **Dr Yasir Saleem Shaikh**

#### **Department of Computer Science, Aberystwyth University**

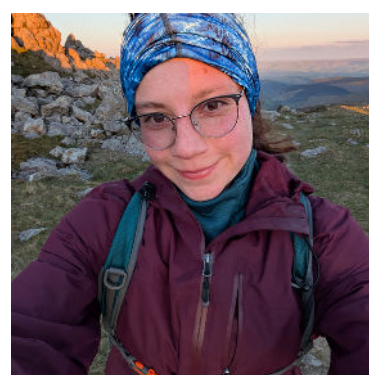
Yasir is a Lecturer in Computer Science and co-convenor of the Early Career Researcher Network at Aberystwyth University. Through these roles, he has developed a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by early career researchers across disciplines. As a committee member of the ECR Colloquium 2026, Yasir contributes to shaping and delivering an engaging and supportive programme for ECRs. He is particularly interested in fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and supporting international researchers in navigating the research landscape in Wales and the wider UK, helping to create opportunities for meaningful connections and impactful research.



### **Dr Chelsea Davis**

#### **Post-Doctoral Research Associate, Department of Life Sciences, Aberystwyth University**

Chelsea is an experienced post-doctoral researcher, specialising in veterinary parasitology and microbiology. Chelsea's research expertise spans cell biology, proteomics, and molecular biology. Chelsea's research is driven by a commitment to understand host-pathogen interactions to advance livestock health, welfare, and productivity.



### **Michelle Munguía Figueroa**

#### **PhD Student, Aberystwyth University**

Driven by a curiosity about the microbial world and its role in ecosystem functioning, Michelle completed a master's degree at the University of California, San Diego, where she studied the role of the microbiome in the growth and survival of zooplankton in lakes. Michelle is currently pursuing a PhD at Aberystwyth University, where she studies the implications of bacterial dormancy for soil health, agricultural productivity, and conservation. Her goal is to contribute to community-led research and help address local and pressing environmental challenges.



### **Dr Aiswarya Girija**

#### **Strategic Research Fellow, IBERS, Aberystwyth University**

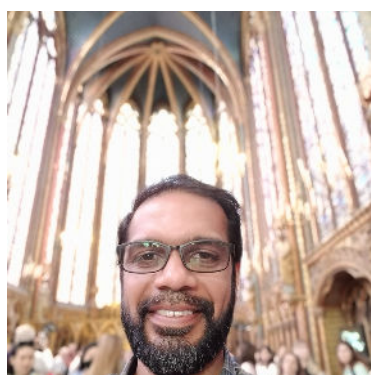
Dr Aiswarya Girija's research is focused on developing climate-resilient and nutritionally enriched cereals using multi-omics approaches. Aiswarya has expertise in metabolomics, molecular biology, protein expression, and biochemistry. Aiswarya completed their PhD in Plant Biotechnology at Kerala University, India, on Type III polyketide synthases in Indian Gooseberry, followed by postdoctoral research at MIGAL, Israel, studying methionine metabolism in Arabidopsis. In 2020, Aiswarya was awarded the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship (SUPERTEFF) to advance the Ethiopian gluten-free cereal Tef, applying metabolomics to assess nutritional diversity and drought-adaptive traits, and developing tissue culture and gene-editing pipelines. Aiswarya is passionate about applying fundamental plant science to improve understudied cereals such as oats and tef, supporting sustainable agriculture and global food security.





## ECR COLLOQUIUM COMMITTEE

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**Valentine Jude Borges**

**Department of Physics, Aberystwyth University**

Val is pursuing his PhD in Physics with the materials science group. Val's work involves modifying surfaces of nanodiamonds to study how receptive they are to heterocyclic drug molecules and includes compositional tailoring to optimise drug loading and release. Val is equally passionate about communicating science to people, so he is working on a podcast series for ECRs. If you are interested in communicating your work to the community, please feel to contact Val.



**Dr Hannah Rees**

**Strategic Research Fellow, IBERS, Aberystwyth University**

Dr Hannah Rees is a Research Fellow at IBERS, Aberystwyth interested in the body clocks of plants. She is fascinated by how biological clocks tick, how they differ between plants, and how we can tweak them to grow better crops.



**Dr Laura Jones**

**Learned Society of Wales' Researcher Development Team**

Dr Laura Jones is a freelance officer within LSW's Researcher Development team. She previously worked at the University of Edinburgh on the ESRC-funded Digital British Islam project, following a similar postdoctoral role at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. She is a social scientist and religious studies scholar with an interest in contemporary Muslim communities. Her research interests include social cohesion, religious occasions and faith in the public space. She is particularly interested in community-building in a Welsh context and is fluent in the Welsh language.



**Dr Barbara Ibinarriaga Soltero**

**Learned Society of Wales' Researcher Development Team**

As the Society's Researcher Development Programme Manager, Barbara is responsible for delivering an impactful programme that supports the professional growth of ECRs across Wales, including the LSW annual ECR Colloquium. Barbara has helped expand the LSW Researcher Development Programme by leading the development of new grant schemes alongside the established Research Workshop Grant Scheme. Through close collaboration with the Researcher Development team, the Researcher Development Advisory Group, and other key stakeholders, Barbara oversees the Programme's core mission of creating an environment in which Wales' current and future research experts can thrive.



**Owen Milton**

**Learned Society of Wales' Researcher Development Team**

Owen Milton is the Learned Society of Wales' Programme Officer for Researcher Development. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Birmingham before achieving an MSc in Psychology from Cardiff University. During his postgraduate studies, he completed a research placement within Cardiff University's Human Factors Excellence Research Group, and has previously worked in communications strategy within sustainable energy. Owen is fluent in the Welsh language.





**Professor Rattan Yadav, FLSW**  
**Chair in Plant Genetics, IBERS, Aberystwyth University**

Professor Yadav's research, over the last 30 years, has focussed on capturing and translating naturally occurring genetic variations present in crops' germplasm for 'public good' outcomes. In partnership with researchers in south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, he has developed novel genetic and genomics resources, and has demonstrated their uses in efficient dissection and breeding of traits such as drought tolerance and grain nutritional traits in pearl millet varieties providing societal, economic, environmental and health impacts at global scale. Professor Yadav also plays a prominent role in shaping international research agendas through service on expert panels for leading UK and global research and innovation agencies such as BBSRC, UKRI, DFID, Innovate UK, British Council, European Commission, and the CGIAR. He served as a panel member for the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 Sub-panel 6 (Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science) and has been reappointed to this panel for REF 2029.



**Professor Rhys Jones, FLSW, FAcSS**  
**Assistant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor, Aberystwyth University**

Rhys Jones is a Professor of Political Geography at Aberystwyth University. His research interests focus on the geography of governance and nationalism, as well as the geography of language. He is Co-Chair of the LSW's Wales Studies Network.

