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Evidence Based or People Based Policy Making?: a view from Wales

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Abstract

This paper draws on the initial experience of the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to policy-making to draw out some of the potential tensions between policy based on a participative model and evidence-based policy-making. The overall outcome in Wales has been twin-track, focusing on core values and wider involvement in policy while at the same time strengthening technical policy capacity. The paper views evidence as a broad church in which professional expertise informs a process of wider engagement. It concludes by considering the effectiveness of some of the individual initiatives in Wales and suggesting possible ways ahead.

Introduction – A Sideways Glance from Wales

Evidence-based policy making has become a central government mantra with increasing efforts being made to apply variations on the so-called gold standard of medical evidence models to the policy-making process. This has been reflected in the creation of the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS), work by the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) and by HM Treasury, and in the overall modernising agenda adopted by Sir Richard Wilson as Cabinet Secretary (Cabinet Office, 1999a).

From the perspective of Wales, these have much to offer. Emphasis on the evidence for the effectiveness of possible government interventions is certainly important. Improving the quality of knowledge, of evaluation and of policy thinking as a whole are certainly necessary to better policy making and to being able to deliver a distinctive policy agenda matched to the needs of Wales.

Devolution presents distinct opportunities for evidence-based working, linked to the aspirations for devolution itself. The relatively manageable scale of Wales creates opportunities to deliver approaches to evidence much more closely attuned to the particular needs of policy makers and citizens. It

offers too the prospect of achieving a greater sense of common purpose to solve problems – between the different tiers of government and between the public, private and voluntary sectors. Wales also has the chance to develop a greater capacity for addressing cross cutting issues, taking account, and promoting better understanding, of the interactions between different policies. Taken together, these give considerable scope for innovation in areas such as evaluation and analysis.

In building policy capacity in Wales, however, the potential problems in the evidence based approach and its associated baggage are also clear. First, it is important to be able to reconcile the ‘expert’ model often underlying the narrowly defined evidence-based approach with the more participative, community-based approach to policy-making adopted by the Assembly. Policy staff have more of a role as facilitators of the policy process than as some grand creator. This demands a different set of skills and relationships. As Perri 6 points out:

Better policy is more likely to come from frank acknowledgement that, in a democracy, we positively want a system which gives recognition to each kind of evidence and judgment, and not just to those who control the slide rule (2002, p.8).

Second, many of the Whitehall tools feel unwieldy and perhaps are unlikely for that reason to be used sustainably. With the comparatively small numbers of policy staff in Wales and the demands placed upon them, usability needs to be the primary goal of any policy tool.

Third, a very important element in improving policy-making in Wales is the ability to ask fundamental questions about aims. The old Welsh Office took its lead almost entirely from Whitehall departments, so the initial challenge is to encourage officials to think creatively about policy direction. In these circumstances, it is often not technical tools as much as thinking space that needs to be generated. The evidence-based approach in its narrower forms can sometimes appear to assume that the aims of policy are uncontested and lock policies into managing delivery. With the strong modernising focus on delivery, policy can sometimes get lost.

The Welsh Assembly Government approach has therefore been to emphasise:

- participation in policy-making;
- strengthening analytical capabilities and knowledge;
- creating tools which offer ease of use; and,
- making corporate connections between policies and the underlying values.

Evidence Base and the Modernising Agenda

The National Assembly for Wales inherited the staff of the former Welsh Office, as well as a range of staff from other public bodies. The Government of Wales Act, as the Scotland Act, also confirmed that the staff of the Assembly would continue to be part of the Home Civil Service and be covered by the Civil Service Code. The Assembly was therefore bound in to

the modernising government agenda being set for the Home Civil Service as a whole.

The old Welsh Office had not been asked to make very much policy for itself and its Ministers were bound by collective responsibility in the Whitehall Cabinet. The creation of the Assembly presented completely new challenges. No longer bound by collective Whitehall responsibility, the Assembly rightly wanted to see policies *made in Wales for Wales* and was looking to create an independent policy-making culture and environment.

With no strong existing policy culture either among staff or wider civil society, the National Assembly was presented with the opportunity to take a more radical approach to policy work. In drawing up the bid to Whitehall for Modernising Government funding, the Assembly Permanent Secretary, Sir John Shortridge, added an additional *Delivering Better Policy* strand to the set of issues identified for the Civil Service as a whole by Sir Richard Wilson. This recognised the particular challenges faced by staff in the Assembly in meeting expectations for distinctive policy-making.

The *Delivering Better Policy* strand has been a driving force with staff in looking at the policy process for the Assembly over the past two years. While it has been able to draw on the work of CMPS, PIU and others over the period, it is designed around the Assembly's need and issues and has developed its own direction and dynamic.

New Ways of Governing

What makes the Assembly's approach to policy-making most distinctive is the commitment to working in very new ways. Many of these commitments have formal legal status under the Government of Wales Act and stem from hopes for a new politics in Wales replacing the 'quango state' with a new participative, consensual approach to decision-making.

The Government of Wales Act requires the Assembly to work in formal partnership with the voluntary sector, local government and business and to promote their interests in policy-making. The Act also created a general duty on the Assembly to have regard to equality of opportunity and to promote sustainable development in exercising its functions. The terms of these duties are set out in formal schemes approved by the Assembly (National Assembly for Wales, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). This is a set of operational requirements for government not paralleled elsewhere.

The Assembly Government has also committed itself to being one of the most open in the world. The work of the Assembly is already conducted largely through ICT (including within the Chamber) and all Assembly papers and proceedings are published on the internet. The debates and committees are also broadcast on a dedicated digital TV channel (S4C2) (available throughout the UK on request on the Sky platform). More recently, the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, has introduced the publication of Cabinet and Cabinet sub-committee papers and minutes six weeks after the relevant meeting and has made a commitment to publishing as a matter of course the

facts behind individual decisions. In the last Cabinet reshuffle, the post of Minister for Open Government was created to help drive this agenda.

Developing the *Delivering Better Policy Agenda*

In drawing up the *Delivering Better Policy* work programme, the Assembly management were able to look across to a range of work emerging from Whitehall and test its relevance to their needs. The elements identified for the programme in Wales, as recorded in the executive summary document, were rooted firmly both in a participative approach and in strengthening technical capability:

Better ways of developing policy – helping to develop a distinctive agenda for Wales, by building on the views, experiences and advice of a wide range of partners and the people of Wales.

Priorities:

- i. Having clear genuine priorities and matching them with resources;
- ii. Building a knowledge base in partnership with the experts;
- iii. Generating long term thinking;
- iv. Strengthening and mainstreaming review and evaluation;
- v. Increasing and improving capacity for policy development.

Organisational Change

Three major organisational changes resulted from the work on policy-making. First, a new Director level post of Research and Development was created in summer 2000, bringing together overall responsibility for research and evaluation with management of the economics and statistical services. This new Group includes a central team responsible for the support and co-ordination of research and evaluation activities across the Assembly. This team aims to develop researchers and policy makers capacity and skills through providing consultation and support; annual reviews of Assembly research and evaluation activity; a professional development programme for researchers; evaluation training for policy makers; development of a research website; and a best practice guide for research and evaluation. The evaluation unit is active in the evaluation community and has set out the prospects for evaluation in a recent paper (Martin and Thurston, 2001).

Second, as part of changes to the senior executive structure, a new Policy Committee was established in November 2001 under the chairmanship of one of the two policy senior directors. The Committee has a remit to support consistency and quality in the policy-making process and has focused particularly on issues which span several policy areas to ensure connections are being made. It meets monthly and includes the Head of Policy and the Director of Research and Development in its membership.

Third, the existing Policy Unit (created just ahead of devolution in November 1998) was merged in November 2001 with the Special Advisors to create a new Cabinet support team (Strategic Policy Unit). The Unit has an agreed programme of policy work for Cabinet on the PIU model as well

as leading on the *Delivering Better Policy* agenda for staff. Its roles are now mirrored by those of the new Whitehall Strategy Unit. The team currently numbers 16 members including the advisors and the sustainable development unit and it can draw on secondees for individual projects.

Cultural Change

A major aim of the *Delivering Better Policy* work has been to encourage staff to think in terms of policy-making in the first place. A traditional office response had been that policy was made by the Minister and they delivered on it – a rather passive, if constitutionally defensible, position.

To raise the profile of policy making, in May 2000, the office was turned into a conference venue for a whole ‘policy week’. Guest speakers – ranging from Geoff Mulgan of PIU to Elliot Stern from the Tavistock Institute – talked about some of the major themes and issues. There were daily workshops and seminars, as well as a policy wall of good ideas and a room 101 of bad things in the foyer and there was an inter-office quiz. The event received very good feedback from the evaluation and served to raise the profile of policy-making and advertise the work to date. A short news style report of the first event was published for staff (Policy Unit, 2001).

The event has been followed up by a series of individual seminars, some organised by the Strategic Policy Unit, others by the Research and Development Group to promote policy engagement. An increasing number of events are being organised by individual policy groups on the same model. A second policy week was held in September 2000, featuring talks from Jonathan Porritt, the Chair of the UK Sustainable Development Commission, and Rowan Williams, the incoming Archbishop of Canterbury.

Creating a Distinctive Approach

In supporting staff in the consistency and quality of policy making, the *Delivering Better Policy* work has needed to make a number of connections with the overall values of the Assembly Government’s approach:

- to the requirements on participation and partnership – the *how* you do policy work;
- to the duties towards sustainable development and equality – the *values* which must inform policy; and,
- to the needs of Wales – the *issues* which policy must address.

The work has sought to strengthen the ability to analyse, to evaluate, to consider options, to commission and conduct research and to use knowledge, but has used the style and values of the Assembly as the medium for promoting action. The aim has been to embed new approaches into the way business is done and to establish a more reflective policy culture.

The How

The Assembly has created very different demands on the policy process, not least the practical demands of serving an Assembly of 60 members, with

fortnightly committees and regular question times. The openness and proximity of this process is a far cry from the Ministerial days of the former Welsh Office and had radically transformed the way business needs to be undertaken. Almost none of Whitehall-based policy training can be directly applied to the Assembly situation.

Policy Gateway

The practical centrepiece of the *Delivering Better Policy* work is a new *policy gateway* on the Assembly intranet site. This steers staff simply through the policy-making process and more importantly, perhaps, provides practical links to document templates to help staff get it right. The intention is to publish the site to internet in 2003 so that the basis on which policy-making is undertaken can be transparent.

The site provides external links but seeks to be as brief and clear as possible, focusing on practical tools rather than text. Its version of good policy-making states that it should:

- get to the real, underlying issue – *ask yourself what am I really trying to improve or change by doing this?*
- be based on the best available evidence of what the issues are and what has worked elsewhere to address them – *draw on the support of Statistics and Economic Advice Divisions and involve outside expertise;*
- be rooted in the overall policy aims of the Welsh Assembly Government – *all individual policies should reflect the overall values of the Government of the day;*
- be deliverable – *think about delivery at the start not as an add-on extra;*
- seek the views of those it is designed to help – *talk to people, don't assume you know what they want;*
- win support, especially from those who are needed to make it happen – *a policy is useless if it can't command support in the Assembly or among those who have to implement it; and,*
- build in monitoring and evaluation against clear objectives from the start – *you need to think how you're going to tell whether it's working.*

Consultation Tools

Within the policy gateway site there is a consultation and participation section which will provide a database of consultees and venues. This site will allow interested individuals to specify what of the Assembly Government's work they want to see or be involved in and it will enable staff to create consultation papers in a common format and undertake block mail shots and invitations to events.

The aim of this element of the site is to get consultation material to far more people in easier to use formats for comment. The work is being developed with the assistance of partnership and equality organisations to ensure it meets user needs, and builds on the experience of a range of innovative consultation exercises already undertaken by the Assembly Government.

The Assembly Government is supporting targeted outreach to particular groups and has funded the creation of policy-hubs for minority groups, such as AWEMA (the All Wales Ethnic Minority Association). It has also strongly supported engagement by young people and is developing a youth website, with Young Voice and the Wales Youth Agency – ‘funkydragon.org’.

The Values

The Assembly has established sustainable development, equality of opportunity and social inclusion as its three guiding themes. These were most recently reaffirmed in the Cabinet’s Strategic document ‘Plan for Wales 2001’ (Welsh Assembly Government, 2001a), which sets out the overall priorities for government to the end of the assembly term. Part of the *Delivering Better Policy* work has been to ensure that these themes are translated into practical action and have sufficient sharpness to test emerging policies.

Policy Testing

Each of the major themes has a small support unit. The Sustainable Development Unit has, since November 2000, formed part of the Strategic Policy Unit and this has enabled more innovative use of the overall themes as policy drivers and tests.

In partnership with the sustainable development charity Forum for the Future, the Assembly Government has developed an ‘integration tool’ which seeks to provide a simple mechanism for staff to test whether their policy ideas or programmes measure up to the Assembly Government’s objectives as a whole. This is being piloted with a view to it forming the standard basis for policy development across the Assembly. Unlike other appraisal tools available in government, this is consciously simple (just four sides long) and discussive/qualitative rather than technical.

The first section of the tool is completed by the policy maker to say why the policy is needed and how it is proposed to take it forward. The latter section is based on the Assembly Government’s overall strategic plan and forms the basis of a workshop with other policy groups to test whether the policy joins up. The process provides a ready indication of potential problem areas and has enough detail to point to where further more formal appraisal or assessment may be needed or legally required. The tool has been widely piloted across the office. It has been used successfully by the Policy Committee to help policy development on large cross-cutting concerns such as the implications of an ageing population and the future of rural areas.

The Issues

Getting a better understanding of the underlying issues facing Wales is a major area of *Delivering Better Policy* work. In the absence of significant policy capacity or debate in wider civic society in Wales, much of this work

is a long-term investment in capacity building both within and outside the Assembly.

Statistics for Wales

The statistical base for policy decisions in Wales has been relatively weak. The major UK based statistical surveys, such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and various surveys to business, often did not produce large enough samples in Wales to give reliable information. This is now being addressed through a series of initiatives that involve the Assembly in funding extensions of existing UK survey work, planning new surveys dedicated to specific Welsh policy issues and seeking to extract maximum statistical value from administrative sources – such as educational records. A key strategy here is to build a solid statistical partnership and infrastructure across all the main public services in Wales. The new Assembly Statistics Programme, 2002-03 to 2004-05, sets out the main plans (Statistical Directorate, 2001).

One important way in which statistical evidence is used to influence policy delivery is through funding formulae such as that used in the calculation of grants to local authorities in Wales. This takes account of statistical indicators of authorities' differing needs, based on detailed analyses. A new unit is being established which will bring together the statistical work on local government finance and the work on associated funding policies and thus provide a fully integrated system. This work is particularly significant as the Assembly Government wishes to see more support for areas of greatest need. This approach can be seen in the report on NHS funding for the National Assembly by Professor Townsend (2002) focusing on tackling the 'inverse-care law'. It has also been reflected in the production of a new index of multiple deprivation for Wales.

Economic Research Advisory Panel

While the former Welsh Office had always had some engagement with social science research, its lack of responsibility for macro-economic issues meant that economic links were relatively weak. The Assembly has a much more proactive stance to the economy, with a new strategy – *A Winning Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002) – and major European funding programmes underway. To strengthen capacity in this area, an economic research advisory panel was established by the Assembly Government in June 2002 with the following terms of reference:

- Advising the Assembly Government on a programme of economic research, monitoring and evaluation;
- Advising the Assembly Government and appropriate Assembly Committees on the outcomes of this programme;
- Promoting collaboration on economic research and the sharing of intelligence between the Assembly Government, its main agencies and other partners;
- Advising on dissemination of research findings; and

- Advising on how best to develop the capacity and expertise of Wales based institutions to contribute to this research agenda.

This panel and its terms of reference very much reflect the collaborative nature of evidence-based work in the Assembly and the importance attached to raising overall expertise and engagement with policy. It has agreed an initial programme of commissioned work and is supported by a dedicated professional Unit.

Academic Network

The context within which evidence is used is vital. Wales suffers from having very little research directed at it, as well as from a dearth of evidence on its underlying issues and problems. Strengthening the overall quality and depth of academic interest in Wales is a priority for the Assembly Government in promoting effective policy-making. While moves to increase the quality of data will help, the Assembly Government sees a more proactive role in fostering academic interest.

To develop greater links, an informal steering group was established in 2000 to develop understanding and practical engagement. A series of policy seminars were held in 2001 and the group is now considering how best to build on this work. Ideas being considered include the possibility of establishing call down contracts with academic groups for rapid input to key policy areas. This will help to bridge the perceived gap between academic lead times and the pressures of the political process for policy-making.

The Assembly has formal agreements with the Research Councils and holds annual meetings to discuss relations and areas of common interest. An Assembly senior official is currently a member of the ESRC Research Priorities Board and links with the ESRC through its devolution programme have been particularly fruitful in creating links between academic and policy thinking. This work opens up the prospect of a genuine ‘policy crucible’ within the UK as increasingly divergent approaches offer scope for comparative study and the testing of innovation.

Whitehall Lessons

The Whitehall process has offered a number of models for Wales to draw from. The Assembly has linked with CMPS, the Strategic Futures Unit and PIU and contributed to the Excellence in Policy Making Knowledge Pool, and to the recent cabinet Office and CMPS publications. Part of the problem for users is the proliferation of units, sites and advice – an issue partly addressed by the creation of the new Strategy Unit under Geoff Mulgan – so one aim within the Assembly has been to boil down this work and apply it to Welsh needs and values.

Cabinet Office/CMPS

Both the Policy Unit and the Research and Development Group have links with the CMPS policy hub and knowledge pools and have contributed to the

various Cabinet Office publications such as *Better Policy Making* (CMPS, 2001) and *Professional Policy Making for the Twenty First Century* (Cabinet Office, 1999b).

The Assembly's Policy Gateway site links to the CMPS policy hub but does not directly use the CMPS' nine points for better policy making, focusing instead on direct application to the processes of the Assembly.

A new training provider has recently been contracted to the Assembly and work is underway to devise a new tailored policy training programme. This will build on a revised competency framework for the Assembly staff and the experience of the policy gateway. The aim overall will be to foster changed values through support of skill development, knowledge of techniques and tools and understanding of procedures.

Her Majesty's Treasury

The Assembly is not bound by the same Public Service Agreement regime as Whitehall Departments, nor is it subject in the same way to spending reviews. The Assembly has, however, followed policy development in Treasury closely and drawn on it as necessary. The Assembly made a bid to the inaugural Evidence based policy fund to conduct research on life transitions in relation to childhood poverty using longitudinal evidence.

Performance and Innovation Unit (now the Strategy Unit)

PIU's report *Adding It Up* (2000) has been influential in thinking about developing analytical capacity in Government and formed part of the basis for the creation of the Research and Development Group. Although the office makes relatively little use of modelling and has no experience of random trials, it has sought to strengthen the policy role of its specialists and the links to academic thinking. A new post of Head of Knowledge Management is being created following an internal report on information management by the Chief Statistician.

The Research and Development Group has undertaken a skills audit of officials involved in research, development and evaluation to create a 'can do' directory to promote methodological knowledge sharing and best practice. There is a database to improve access to evidence from research projects undertaken for the National Assembly for Wales and work is in hand on a Research, Development and Evaluation internet site through which databases, research forum best practice guidance and other information useful for evidence-based policy-making will be made available publicly.

Regulatory Impact

The Assembly has a legal obligation to assess the impacts of its regulations but – lacking primary legislation – it does not have regulatory reform powers. One of the Strategic Policy Unit projects has been exploring existing delivery mechanisms with a view to providing advice on how to deliver results with the least external overheads.

The Business Partnership Council provides a regular forum for business and trade unions to discuss the impact of Assembly policies. The Assembly Government is funding a new external Social Partners Unit to enable the sector to engage more effectively with the policy-making process.

Lessons from the Approach to Date

A number of policy development models have been used across the Assembly's work in its short life which have been trying to find ways to address the challenges of fresh approaches to policy-making:

- **People in Communities** – *using academic and local links*. The People in Communities programme was set up consciously as a pilot exercise to test a particular approach to community participation in setting local regeneration objectives. An academic was seconded in to the team and provided a focus for development and evaluative effort. The team in turn worked closely with the local partnerships and their co-ordinators to share experience from the work. The evaluation of the scheme contributed to the design of the subsequent all-Wales Communities First programme, based on capacity building and action planning in the poorest 100 communities.
- **Extending Entitlement** – *a professional steering group and user engagement*. A project of the Policy Unit, Extending Entitlement examined the needs of young people and developed a very different approach to that established in England under the Connexions programme. Working with an external steering group drawn from the voluntary and local government sectors, the project worked directly with young people to identify what they wanted from government. The overall approach was to support the idea of universal entitlements for young people which were responsive to needs and opportunities. This led to Wales-only clauses in the Education and Skills Act which placed a duty on local authorities to reflect young people's needs in service planning, subject to statutory guidance from the Assembly.
- **Plan for Wales 2001** – *giving strategic direction and seeking views*. Plan for Wales 2001 was the first strategic plan for government of the new Labour/Liberal Democrat partnership administration. It had the job of bringing together the goals set in the first plan – BetterWales.com – and the aims set in the Partnership agreement, *Putting Wales First* to create a single planning document for the Assembly Government programmes. The plan was kept very short and was subject to consultation featuring a newspaper advert asking people to 'tell Rhodri what matters'. There was a dedicated internet site which featured on-line comments and on-line voting for favourite policies to encourage more interaction. Though the numbers who engaged with the exercise were not large (about 1,000 copies of the document and some 350 replies and votes), it did succeed in attracting more comments from members of the public than traditional approaches.
- **Sustainable Development** – *an open process working with partner organisations*. The statutory sustainable development scheme was

developed in a series of invited workshop sessions and through an on-line draft document and discussion forum. Individual strands of work were taken forward in partnership with Cardiff University, WWF Cymru, RSPB Cymru and Oxfam Cymru. Work is currently in hand to establish an independent sustainable development forum as a public limited company with the aim of advising the Assembly and engaging civil society. An initial set of 12 sustainable development indicators were established through an external working group and formally adopted by the Assembly. These include an ecological footprint indicator following work undertaken on footprinting for the Assembly by WWF Cymru.

- **ICT** – *an innovative approach to engagement and working across boundaries*. Cymru ar Lein (Online for a Better Wales) (Welsh Assembly Government, 2001b) is a distinctive ICT framework strategy which aims to use the Assembly Government values to shape overall public sector and private ICT investment, rather than pursue a series of isolated investment projects. Consultation and development of the strategy has itself been heavily ICT based. The strategy brings together work across public agencies and is leading to a substantial collective public investment in increased broadband capacity.
- **Narrowing the Gap** – *working across boundaries and with local expertise*. The narrowing the gap project is working jointly with the Welsh Local Government Association and Estyn – the schools inspectorate – to establish why some secondary schools in poorer areas perform well and others do not. The project is under the aegis of the formal Local Government Partnership Council and is working closely with individual schools and drawing on existing research evidence to establish best practice and promote it to the schools who could be doing better. The work is due to report late in 2002 and a further study of primary schools is planned.
- **Economic Activity** – *exploring a very distinctive policy issue*. One of the inaugural projects for the Cabinet’s Strategic Policy Unit has been to look at the nature of economic inactivity in Wales and propose policy responses. This is an area where Wales performs poorly – particularly in the upper South Wales valleys – but where there is little current programme work. The work has been developed on a rapid time-scale through interviews with individual representative groups and in an invited national symposium. It has drawn heavily on statistical and economic expertise within the office, on the research programme of the Department for Work and Pensions and on wider published research. It has been led by a steering group chaired by the Director of Research and Development. More detailed commissioned research on transitions from and to inactivity is now planned as part of the Economic Research Unit programme.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The Assembly Government’s emphasis on a participative approach is a welcome check on the potential technocratic aspects of evidence-based

policy-making but it is not without its own risks. One of the challenges facing the Assembly staff is to develop techniques which help to facilitate a participative *and* informed policy process.

Few people come in to process of policy-making without existing positions and goals and any participative process risks capture by minority interests or the creation of a lowest common-denominator where everyone gets a bit of what they wanted but the overall outcome is weak.

An ideal participative process fully engages those who are meant to be influenced by policy changes and those who may have to implement them. This approach builds ownership of policy outcomes and avoids the risk of inventing something which is irrelevant or unwieldy to those on the ground. But any participative approach needs to be informed by hard evidence as well as practical experience and qualitative work. This is where bringing evidence-based material into a participative approach can have real impact.

Wales is a good size to test the factors which need to go together to make good policy-making and to trial approaches to bringing together evidence-based and participative policy development. There is a real prospect for ground breaking work in areas such as evaluating across functional divides and over wider policy issues, in mainstreaming sustainable development into the policy-testing process and in innovative participative techniques.

The success of this approach will in part depend on the degree of progress in establishing a wider public policy capacity in Wales and increasing academic interest. While the ESRC devolution programme has made a very good start, the challenge of a devolved UK politics for all the social sciences is to seize the opportunities for innovation and comparison which are increasingly available.

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(Welsh Assembly Government publications are accessible on line at www.wales.gov.uk)