

Research and innovation in Wales, October 2018

Tenovus Cancer Care is Wales' leading cancer charity. Our aims are simple. We want to help prevent, treat and find a cure for cancer.

We do this by offering support, advice and treatment to cancer patients and their loved ones. We also promote healthy lifestyles and fund cancer research to find new ways to prevent it, diagnose it, and treat it.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this important consultation.

Welsh Government says that there needs to be a “major increase” in research intended to help solve specific challenges facing Wales (challenge-led research). It also says this type of research needs to be balanced with the more traditional type of long-term research undertaken by universities which pushes the boundaries of knowledge.

- ***To what extent do you agree with this view and how can Welsh Government ensure that an increase in one type of research activity doesn't mean the other type loses out?***

Tenovus Cancer Care believes that, in the ongoing battle for a world where no one dies of cancer, market-forces alone are insufficient to achieve a socially just distribution of research.

As a member of the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) we support work to identify potential gaps in research provision that might not be met by a market-led approach. Universities are incredibly important centres of research and Tenovus Cancer Care would be wary of a 'hollowing-out' of the university sector by any changes. It is imperative that any changes compliment, rather than replace the research endeavour of the university sector by partnering with, not supplanting it - and ultimately leading to an increase in the overall funding package available for the sector.

We also fund cancer research, not just in universities but also in the community - predominantly via our iGrants, and in industry - via the Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS2) programme. Therefore, to a certain extent, Tenovus Cancer Care implicitly agrees with the need to shift, as a percentage of total work, the focus of research away from uniquely university-focussed endeavours as it is currently proactively engaged in this endeavour itself.

The Welsh Government, via Health Care Research Wales, has a role to play to compliment the work of the NCRI by encouraging and facilitating a collaborative approach to identify, and helping fill, gaps in research provision. In particular, ensuring existing funding is better publicised, applied for and the resultant research suitably utilised, for example by ensuring university-private/third sector partnerships, is an area that would benefit from considerable improvement.

Welsh Government has said it wants to bring all research funding together and that this funding should then be available to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), large private businesses, and other organisations as well as universities and colleges.

- ***To what extent should businesses and other organisations be able to receive Government research funding that might have otherwise gone to universities and colleges? How could this be done without under-funding some organisations – might there be unintended consequences?***

Tenovus Cancer Care broadly agrees with the principle of making funding available for non-university-based research endeavours. It is important that, while the pursuit of knowledge is an invaluable endeavour, research must be practically applicable in order to deliver better outcomes for cancer patients, and their families. However, as previously stated Tenovus Cancer Care believes that market-forces alone are insufficient to achieve a socially just distribution of research and it is essential that a cross-sectoral approach is taken to ensure that Welsh Government funding is not complicit in exaggerating a market failure in the research field that leads to certain subjects being over-looked.

Nevertheless, Tenovus Cancer Care believes that overall level of funding currently available for research is inadequate. There are many new technologies which are too expensive for governments alone to fund, and the obvious route is partnership with start-up Welsh companies and inter-national industry. Therefore using Welsh Government funding to leverage-in additional resources from the private and third sector is important, and welcome - but not a panacea. It is also important to ensure that, where funding is given to the non-University sectors, funding streams are not rebranded and subsequently repackaged back to the University sector, without adding significant value that outweighs the administrative loss associated with the funding having been effectively delegated to third parties.

Tenovus Cancer Care believes this could be mitigated by ensuring a coordinated approach in helping identify and fill gaps in research provision. In particular, ensuring existing funding is better publicised, applied for and the resultant research suitably utilised, for example by ensuring university-private/third sector partnerships, is an area that would benefit from considerable improvement.

In a recent review into research funding, it was argued that there was a strong risk of university research and innovation interests overshadowing the research and innovation interests of private businesses. But it didn't then go on to suggest a way of stopping this happening.

- ***What needs to be done to ensure businesses and their interests are not over-shadowed by universities when it comes to research and innovation funding and activity?***

Tenovus Cancer Care believes this could be mitigated by ensuring a coordinated approach in helping identify and fill gaps in research provision, by ensuring existing funding is better publicised, applied for, and subsequently leveraging in involvement, expertise, perspective and funding from aligned industries such as relevant private and third sector partners to ensure the resultant research is suitably utilised.

In the academic year 2016/17 there were 241 graduate start-ups reported by Welsh universities with an estimated turnover of £56 million, this was almost double the turnover of university staff start-ups in the same year.

- ***What is currently in place from universities and Welsh Government to help and support student and graduate entrepreneurs turn their ideas into successful ventures?***

Tenovus Cancer Care is a proud participant in the KESS2. We believe that this model is a useful approach in ensuring suitable collaboration between the university and private/third sectors to marry up academic expertise with practical application. Measures to strengthen and ensure continuation of the programme would be welcomed.

The recent review of research made recommendations to help incentivise businesses and universities to work closely together on research and innovation to take their collaborations to “greater heights”.

- ***What are businesses and universities able to offer each other when they work in collaboration on research and innovation projects?***

Tenovus Cancer Care is proud of its innovative approach to cancer research. In addition to KESS2, which offers collaborative research projects (Research Masters and PhD) linked with a local company partner we also fund an iGrants programme, exploring work that develops new and innovative ways to help support an ever growing number of people throughout their cancer journey. We fund iGrants that:

- work with communities to develop programmes that promote healthy living, early detection and screening;
- learn from the experiences and opinions of people who have been affected by cancer to develop new ways to care and support for others who have been affected by the disease;
- give health professionals working in the field the opportunity to develop new ways to treat and support cancer patients and families before, during and after their treatment