

## Setting of Well-being Objectives: Medr – the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

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## Background: Our examinations of the setting of well-being objectives

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) places a 'well-being duty' on 56 public bodies. The duty requires those bodies to set and publish 'well-being objectives' that are designed to maximise their contribution to achieving each of the Act's seven national well-being goals<sup>1</sup>. They must also take all reasonable steps, in exercising their functions, to meet those objectives.
- 2 The Auditor General must carry out examinations to assess the extent to which public bodies have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives<sup>2</sup>. We have been carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations<sup>3</sup>.
- 3 To do something in accordance with the sustainable development principle means acting 'in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. To achieve this, a public body must take account of the five ways of working: long term, integration, involvement, collaboration, and prevention<sup>4</sup>.
- 4 We designed an assessment framework to enable us to assess the extent to which public bodies have applied the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives. **Appendix 1** sets out further information on our approach, including a set of 'positive indicators' that illustrate what good could look like.
- 5 Medr – Wales's Commission for Tertiary Education and Research – is the most newly created body to come under the Act. Medr became operational on 1 August 2024 following a period of initial development work<sup>5</sup>.
- 6 Medr funds and regulates the tertiary education and research sector in Wales. This includes further education, higher education – including research and innovation, apprenticeships, adult community learning, and local authority-maintained school sixth forms. Medr inherited functions and staff from the now dissolved Higher

<sup>1</sup> The seven national well-being goals are a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and a globally responsible Wales.

<sup>2</sup> Section 15 (1) (a) Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

<sup>3</sup> The Auditor General must carry out examinations over the period set out in the Act, which begins one year before a Senedd election and end one year and one day before the following Senedd election. We carried out this examination in the second reporting period, which covered 2020-2025.

<sup>4</sup> Section 5 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

<sup>5</sup> Medr was created through the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022. It was formally established on 4 September 2023 and began preparatory work following the appointment of its Board.

Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). It also took on certain functions that were previously with the Welsh Government.

## Carrying out our examination at Medr

- 7 The aim of this examination was to:
  - provide assurance on the extent that Medr applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives; and
  - identify opportunities for Medr to further embed the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives in future.
- 8 We set out to answer the overall question: ‘to what extent has Medr acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?’ We did this by exploring the following questions:
  - Was the process Medr put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?
  - Has Medr considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
  - Has Medr put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?
- 9 We discussed the timing of the examination with Medr and tailored the delivery to reflect its circumstances. We took the opportunity to carry out the examination in ‘real time’, while Medr was developing its well-being objectives. This allowed us to:
  - observe key parts of the process, including in the lead up to it becoming operational;
  - gain valuable insight and audit evidence; and
  - share early findings while the process was still ‘live’.
- 10 We gathered most of our evidence between July 2024 and October 2024. This included:
  - reviewing key documents;
  - interviewing key staff; and
  - observations at stakeholder engagement events, as well as at board and senior staff meetings.
- 11 This was not designed to be an in-depth examination. We were sensitive to the wider pressures Medr was facing at the time. We maintained a tight focus on our audit questions and took a proportionate approach to our evidence gathering.

Findings from this work informed our recent report on the implementation of the Act across public bodies in Wales<sup>6</sup>.

## How and when Medr set its well-being objectives

- 12 The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 sets out 11 strategic duties for Medr. It also requires Welsh Ministers to publish a statement of priorities for the sector<sup>7</sup>. The strategic duties and statement of priorities set out the Welsh Government's long-term ambitions for tertiary education and research and innovation.
- 13 Medr was required to prepare a strategic plan to respond to the strategic duties and statement of priorities. It decided to bring its key planning requirements together by incorporating its well-being objectives into the strategic plan and making that document its 'well-being statement'<sup>8</sup>.
- 14 Medr submitted its strategic plan to Welsh Ministers for approval by the required deadline in December 2024. It then published the plan in March 2025.
- 15 The strategic plan sets out a series of aims, which are also Medr's well-being objectives (**Exhibit 1**). There is one 'foundation aim', which is focused on Medr as an organisation, and five 'strategic aims' which are more externally focused.

### Exhibit 1: Medr's strategic aims and well-being objectives to 2030

Foundation Aim: To establish Medr as a highly effective organisation and trusted regulator.

Strategic Aim 1: To focus the tertiary education sector around the needs of the learner.

Strategic Aim 2: To create a flexible and joined-up tertiary system where everyone can acquire the skills and knowledge they need for a changing economy and society.

<sup>6</sup> Auditor General for Wales, [No time to lose: Lessons from our work under the Well-being of Future Generations Act](#), April 2025

<sup>7</sup> Welsh Government, [Statement of strategic priorities for tertiary education and research and innovation](#), February 2024

<sup>8</sup> Section 7 (1) (c) of the Act requires public bodies to publish a statement when publishing well-being objectives, known as 'well-being statements'. These statements must include specific information, such as the steps that public bodies propose to take to meet their well-being objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle.

Strategic Aim 3: To ensure learners receive the highest quality provision in a tertiary education sector that strives for continuous improvement.

Strategic Aim 4: To grow internationally acclaimed research and inspire innovation throughout the tertiary education sector.

Strategic Aim 5: To encourage greater use of the Welsh language, increasing demand for and participation in learning and assessment through the medium of Welsh.

Source: Medr, [Strategic Plan 2025-2030](#), March 2025

## What we found

**Medr embraced the sustainable development principle to help develop its first well-being objectives, although there is work to do to align its resources to support delivery and set out impact measures**

### The process for setting well-being objectives

#### The planning process

- 16 Medr recognised it had a unique opportunity to embed the Act in the organisation from the outset. It put its well-being objectives at the heart of its first strategic plan, to help ensure they were setting the direction for the organisation and driving future activity. This approach reflects statutory guidance and good practice.
- 17 Medr clearly set out to apply the sustainable development principle when developing the strategic plan. It recognised that doing this would be a challenge, given the tight statutory timetable and wider demands of establishing a new organisation. To help manage this, it took a project management approach and brought in external capacity to help prepare the plan.
- 18 Medr appears keen to establish itself as a listening and learning organisation. It has not yet developed a means of learning from and improving how it applied the sustainable development principle. However, the way it engaged with our work at a busy time showed a keenness to learn and improve.

## Consultation and involvement

- 19 Medr sought to engage with its anticipated staff base as the first step in developing its well-being objectives. Starting in December 2023 before it was formally established, Medr ran sessions to help shape a draft vision, values and well-being objectives that had been developed initially by leadership. It then took time to show how it had taken account of feedback.
- 20 However, staff engagement was challenging during this period. Medr did not have formal engagement mechanisms in place and most of those involved were not employed by Medr itself at the time, but rather by HEFCW or the Welsh Government. Furthermore, exactly who would transfer from the Welsh Government had not been determined.
- 21 Medr recognised it could have strengthened and expanded staff engagement, despite the constraints. It would have liked to have carried out further staff engagement before consulting externally on the draft strategic plan in September 2024 and then agreeing the final plan in November. However, time pressures for final sign off, along with continuing recruitment activity, meant that it was unable to prioritise this.
- 22 Medr did discuss its draft well-being objectives with trade union representatives, once those representatives were in place from September 2024. Its strategic plan notes that it reached consensus with its trade unions on the objectives<sup>9</sup>, and sets out its commitment to 'embed meaningful social partnership' in its culture and working practices.
- 23 Medr was also committed to hearing from external stakeholders. It was proactive in beginning a conversation with representatives from organisations across the sector before its formal launch, holding engagement events in July 2024 in North and South Wales attended by over 150 people. During these events, Medr led a conversation on tertiary education, and sought views on the role it can play and on its draft well-being objectives.
- 24 Medr followed these events with a public consultation on the draft strategic plan and well-being objectives, which ran during September and October 2024. Medr received 101 responses. It had planned to do some further assessment of how representative of the sector the responses were, but due to other demands was unable to. It noted there were no responses from English-speaking sixth form colleges and that it would be important to hear from them in future.
- 25 During the consultation period, Medr also commissioned an independent research company to engage with learners across the tertiary sector. The researchers ran five online focus groups with a small sample of learners from various parts of

<sup>9</sup> Under section 16 of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, Medr is required to, in so far as is reasonable, seek consensus or compromise with its recognised trade unions or (where there is no recognised trade union) other representatives of its staff on its well-being objectives.

tertiary education. Given the limited scale of this exercise, Medr is not able to say that it reached the diversity of the learner population.

- 26 While it is positive that Medr sought to hear from learners, it recognises it could expand on this. It has also identified the need to engage with ‘future learners’. Involving current, and particularly future learners, is challenging given the breadth of post-16 education across Wales. Medr plans to develop new engagement mechanisms, to enable it to hear from key groups on an ongoing basis. This will include a learner voice forum.
- 27 Medr also held one employer engagement session. The number of potential employers Medr could engage with is extensive. It will be important for Medr to consider how it engages effectively with a representative range of employers in future. Medr’s strategic plan sets out commitments that describe its intention to work with employers.

#### **Other sources of evidence**

- 28 Medr reviewed some key external evidence to help inform its well-being objectives. This included Public Services Boards’ well-being assessments, Regional Partnership Board population needs assessments, and the Welsh Government’s Future Trends report<sup>10</sup>. The exercise identified some relevant themes. For example, the need to respond to the demand for Welsh language provision and a changing population, which is reflected in aspects of Medr’s strategic plan.
- 29 Medr’s review of external evidence was limited by a lack of analytical capacity. To help develop its evidence base, Medr’s consultation asked stakeholders to identify further evidence it should draw upon to inform its strategic plan and well-being objectives. 83% of respondents stated that there was additional evidence that needed to be reflected in the plan. The suggested sources covered themes such as better information on future skills and workforce needs across the economy, and on the future challenges and demands that would affect learners. While it is not clear exactly how these evidence sources further shaped the plan, it does refer to relevant themes.
- 30 Medr intends to extend and enhance its evidence base as it expands its research and statistical capacity. It recognises that this will help inform future reviews of the strategic plan and well-being objectives (see **paragraph 37**).

#### **Planning to improve well-being**

- 31 Medr has ensured its well-being objectives reflect the wider expectations and requirements placed upon it. It has aligned the objectives to the strategic duties outlined in the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 Act and the Ministers’ Statement of Priorities (see **paragraph 12**).

<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government, [Future Trends Report](#), 2021



- 32 References in the strategic plan show Medr is thinking about how it can have broad impact on the well-being of Wales. These include how Medr intends to:
- help foster a ‘vibrant culture where the Welsh language can thrive’;
  - promote equality of opportunity and supporting the development of cohesive communities; and
  - support a productive economy and delivery of the green skills required in the future.
- 33 Medr has also considered the connections between its well-being objectives and the objectives of certain stakeholders. It looked at the well-being objectives of certain other national bodies covered by the Act to identify common ground. It has also considered the strategic objectives of the different commissioners in Wales that are not covered by the Act<sup>11</sup>.
- 34 However, Medr has many other stakeholders, notably but not exclusively across the tertiary education sector. It will be important for Medr to consider how it can understand and explore the various objectives and priorities of other organisations in a proportionate and manageable way. This could be done, for example, as part of engagement and consultation and not limited to desktop research<sup>12</sup>.
- 35 Medr has been clear that it is early days and that it is still working out how to meet the challenges it faces, as well as maximising the opportunities from bringing together functions across post-16 education. For example, it is considering how it can join up work to support learners with additional learning needs and what the benefits of a more cross-cutting approach might be. Medr is also aware that it will need to clarify how it relates to other parts of the system, including certain parts of the Welsh Government with related responsibilities.
- 36 With Medr still exploring how it can best fulfil its role, it has articulated the impact it is seeking to have for the long term, while placing a focus on the initial action it needs to take. The strategic plan sets out:
- ‘Founding commitments’, which will be prioritised over the next two-years. These reflect Medr’s status as a new organisation and the need for a ‘smooth transition’.
  - ‘Growth commitments’, with a five-year time horizon. More limited work will begin on these, to lay the ground for future action.
- 37 It is positive that Medr has set out the longer-term direction of travel, while also focusing on necessary short-term steps. Medr sees this first strategic plan as a transitional document that it is likely to review in 2027. Medr may also need to

<sup>11</sup> The Older People’s Commissioner, the Children’s Commissioner, the Welsh Language Commissioner, and the Future Generations Commissioner.

<sup>12</sup> The Future Generations Commissioner has brought together well-being objectives of public bodies covered by the Act (which does not include tertiary education bodies). The Future Generations Commissioner’s office can provide this information on request.

review the strategic plan in response to any changes in the Ministerial statement of priorities following the next Senedd election in May 2026.

## **Delivering the well-being objectives**

- 38 At the time of our fieldwork, Medr was developing an operational plan<sup>13</sup> to set out the more detailed steps it will take to deliver its well-being objectives. Guidance sets out roles and responsibilities for staff in populating, delivering, and reporting against the plan. Helpfully, the template for the plan includes key information, such as timescales for delivery and resources that are needed, covering finances, capacity and skills.
- 39 Medr also intends for its operational plan to set out how it will work with stakeholders to deliver each activity. This reflects the clear commitment to working with others to deliver its well-being objectives, expressed in its strategic plan.
- 40 At the time of our fieldwork, Medr had not yet developed separate strategic financial or workforce plans. In doing so, it will be important for Medr to take a medium, and ideally, longer-term view, ensuring that any such strategies are aligned to the well-being objectives. This will help ensure the objectives are achievable. It should also inform decisions about the phasing of work on the growth commitments and any refresh of its strategic plan in 2027.

## **Monitoring the well-being objectives**

- 41 Medr has not yet set out measures to accompany its well-being objectives in its strategic plan. It considers that identifying appropriate strategic success measures that reflect the full range of its activities across tertiary education will take time. Medr has committed to establishing baseline data and designing a measures framework to allow it to understand both the progress it is making in the short term and its longer-term impact.
- 42 Medr has begun work on the measures framework through the development of its operational plan. The operational plan template prompts staff to identify the:
- outputs that capture ‘what’ is being delivered; and
  - outcomes they hope to contribute to through particular activities or groups of activities<sup>14</sup>.
- 43 Medr is also interested in understanding how the outcomes it intends to deliver relate to the wider well-being of Wales. The operational plan template prompts staff to identify the national indicators<sup>15</sup> its activities will contribute to. It is not yet clear how these elements will come together in the measures framework. However, it is

<sup>13</sup> Medr, [Operational Plan 2025-26](#), June 2025

<sup>14</sup> The information on outputs and outcomes will be for internal use and will not be included in the published operational plan.

<sup>15</sup> Welsh Government, [Wellbeing of Wales: national indicators](#), September 2022

positive to see the emphasis that Medr is placing on understanding the difference it is making.

- 44 At this stage, the focus is on identifying measures for future use, rather than reporting against them in the short term. Medr does not expect that the measures framework will be in place before it refreshes its strategic plan in 2027. Medr will, instead, report progress in delivering each activity in its operational plan. Information will be shared with the Board on a quarterly basis. It will also be shared with the Welsh Government at quarterly accountability meetings.
- 45 However, there may also be potential to assess impact in the interim. For example, through qualitative data or by using some inherited data sets from legacy organisations. Medr may be able to identify interim data sets as it goes through the process of pulling together measures for future use in the measures framework. This would provide useful evidence to inform its likely planned refresh of the strategic plan in 2027.

## Recommendations

- R1 Building on work already undertaken, Medr should seek more extensive views from key stakeholders, including learners, future learners and employers, when reviewing its well-being objectives and setting future ones.

In doing so, it should seek to ensure it is able to draw on views that reflect the diversity of the population. This is likely to include drawing on the stakeholder networks it has committed to establish (see **paragraphs 23 to 27**).

- R2 Medr should develop a more comprehensive means of understanding the objectives of a wider range of partners and how they relate to its own well-being objectives. We recognise that Medr will need to consider what is manageable and proportionate, given the breadth of its stakeholder base (see **paragraphs 33 and 34**).

- R3 As Medr develops its strategic financial and workforce planning, it should take account of the medium and, ideally, longer term and ensure any such strategies are aligned to its strategic plan.

Doing so should help inform decisions about the phasing of work on the growth commitments and the refresh of its strategic plan in 2027 (see **paragraph 40**).

- R4 While Medr is developing a new measures framework with the intention of introducing it in 2027, it should reflect on whether it can use qualitative data or inherited data sets from legacy organisations to tell a story of its performance and impact in the first two years of its strategic plan and well-being objectives (see **paragraphs 41 to 45**).

## Appendix 1: Key questions and what we looked for

The table below sets out the question we sought to answer in carrying out this examination, along with some sub-questions to guide our evidence gathering. They are based on the positive indicators we have previously used in our sustainable development principle examinations, which were developed through engagement with public bodies and informed by advice and guidance from the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. This list is not a checklist, but rather an illustrative set of characteristics that describe what good could look like.

**To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?**

**Planning: Was the process the body put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?**

<p><b>Has the body used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how they might change over time?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The body has a clear and balanced assessment of progress against previous well-being objectives that has been used to inform the body's understanding of the 'as is'/short-term need.</li> <li>• The body has set well-being objectives based on a good understanding of current and future need, risk and opportunities, including analysis of future trends. This is likely to be drawn from a range of local and national sources, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Public Services Boards' well-being assessments</li> <li>– Regional Partnership Boards' population assessments</li> <li>– The results of local involvement/consultation exercises</li> <li>– Service monitoring and complaints</li> <li>– Future Trends report</li> <li>– Natural Resources Wales' State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales and Area Based Assessments</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The body has sought to understand the root causes of problems so that it can address negative cycles and intergenerational challenges through its well-being objectives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Has the body involved others in developing its well-being objectives?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The body uses the results of involvement to help select its well-being objectives. That involvement – whether primary, secondary or a combination – reflects the full diversity of the population.</li> <li>• Involvement reflects good practice and advice from the Future Generations Commissioner.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Has the body considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The well-being objectives have been designed to improve well-being in the broadest sense and make a contribution across the seven national well-being goals.</li> <li>• The well-being objectives have been designed to reflect and capitalise on the connections between different areas of work.</li> <li>• There is a well-developed understanding of how the well-being objectives impact on/relate to what other public bodies are trying to achieve and opportunities to work together.</li> </ul>

<b>Has the body designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The body has set objectives that are sufficiently ambitious and have been designed to drive activity across the organisation.</li> <li>• The objectives are designed to meet short and longer-term need. Where objectives are set over a short to medium-term timeframe, they are set in the context of longer-term considerations or ambitions.</li> </ul>
<b>Resourcing and delivery: Has the body considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?</b>	
<b>Has the body considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources have been allocated to ensure the objectives can be delivered over the short and medium term, but the body has also considered longer-term resources, risks and/or how it can resource longer-term objectives.</li> <li>• The body has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.</li> </ul>
<b>Has the body considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The body is drawing on its knowledge of partners' objectives/activity, its relationships and collaborative arrangements to make sure it can deliver on cross-cutting ambitions.</li> </ul>
<b>Monitor and review: Has the body put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?</b>	

<p><b>Has the body developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance measures are designed to reflect the sustainable development principle, eg by focusing on outcomes that cut across departmental/organisational boundaries and deliver multiple (including preventative) benefits over the longer term.</li> <li>• There is a 'golden thread' that will allow the body to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Is the body seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The body shows self-awareness and a commitment to improving how it applies the sustainable development principle so that it can do so in a meaningful and impactful way.</li> <li>• The body has learnt from setting previous well-being objectives and from applying the sustainable development principle more generally and has improved the process for setting its new well-being objectives.</li> <li>• The body has or plans to reflect on how it has applied the sustainable development principle in this round of setting well-being objectives.</li> </ul>







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