

## Creative Exchange Wales Network

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Creative Exchange Wales Network (CEWN) is a joint AHRC and A4B/Welsh Government initiative to support the creative economy in Wales. Led by Professor Hamish Fyfe (USW) on behalf of Universities in Wales, CEWN stimulates growth in the creative economy by developing local KE activity, participation and practice. The project is based on the need to support, sustain and grow the opportunities for collaboration, specifically around the themes of Globalising the Welsh Creative Industries; Digital Past and Futures; and Creative Industries and Health and Wellbeing. CEWN has learned from the development of the process over 2012-13 and has found the following outcomes:

- Finding the 'appropriate' funding level is critical.
- Co-funding is a viable mechanism for project funding.
- Early career researchers have benefited from the process.
- Outcomes from KE events are not always as expected.
- Mentoring to develop projects is important.
- Legacy and sustainability needs to be built into the project.
- Incentives to participate include financial incentives, but must also include networking.
- Working as part of a team- with university buy-in and support- is important.

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Creative Exchange Wales Network (CEWN) is a joint AHRC and A4B<sup>1</sup>/Welsh Government initiative to support the creative economy in Wales. Led by Professor Hamish Fyfe (University of South Wales) on behalf of Universities in Wales, CEWN aims to harness localised activity, participation and practice to impact the creative economy. The project is based on the need to support, sustain and grow the opportunities for collaboration, specifically around the themes of Globalising the Welsh Creative Industries; Digital Past and Futures; and Creative Industries and Health and Wellbeing.

The project initially ran during 2012-13 and achieved the following aims:

- 1) *Creative Capacity*: Knowledge exchange events and a series of pilot projects to pump prime collaborative R & D for the creative economy
- 2) *Creative Crucible*: Provision of a developmental platform for emerging researchers and businesses within the creative disciplines
- 3) *Creative Canvas*: A stock take of the activities of the creative industries sector in Wales

### **Creative Capacity: linking creative academics and businesses in Wales**

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The purpose of the Creative Capacity was to focus on collaborative knowledge exchange between academics and businesses in the creative industries, supporting development of imaginative projects. Proposals had a number of formats including proof of concept, small pilot projects, equipment grants, travel support, and projects that will help to facilitate an application for external funding for research. We particularly encouraged collaborative, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary knowledge exchange

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activities. For each application, we expected collaboration between at least one academic partner and one business partner.

The process for Creative Capacity was underpinned through three knowledge exchange events held across Wales. The exchange events were professionally facilitated to develop collaborative project ideas. The 3 events involved 77 individuals with a 40:60 split between academia and external stakeholders. During each event, a professional facilitator:

- Facilitated knowledge exchange between participants
- Created the conditions for both large and small-group interactions
- Provided the framework for ideas creation and development that will lead to the creation of project proposals.

The unique partnership between the AHRC and A4B brought extra funding to the Creative Capacity, with A4B funding the exchange events that produced project plans eligible for £10,000 AHRC development funds allocated to each event. The project plans were not completed by the end of each event but within a deadline typically within 3-4 weeks of the event.

## What have we learned?

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### 1. Finding the appropriate funding level

CEWN uses a typical £2500 as a guideline amount for funding projects. This is, of course, much smaller than the majority of KE funding support and as a result we have engaged with many SMEs and single employee businesses. Where we have had less interest is from the bigger creative companies- the cash incentive is limited and the expected reward from small scale funding is seen as less tempting. However, we believe that £2500 can still act as an incentive for researchers and smaller creative businesses to become involved.

What CEWN has been able to do is fill a niche that is otherwise unfilled the small scale funding gap. In "*Connecting and growing creative businesses through engagement with higher education institutions*" (Channer, Owens and Lee 2013) the authors highlighted that there is a 'funding gap' for KE; CEWN provides an opportunity for smaller-scale companies and earlier career academics to join together, to form new collaborations, and to develop the basis for longer-term joint working.

However, we did find some difficulty in getting some universities to work at these lower funding levels. With the Full Economic Costing regime, universities have found it difficult to return to a direct cost recovery model; this was important for us to do as the costs associated with FEC would have immediately escalated beyond the guideline funding amount.

### 2. Co-funding

CEWN is jointly funded by AHRC and A4B/Welsh Government. Co-funding has been important for us, reaching the aims for a number of different funders and demonstrating significant value from co-funding arrangements between AHRC and A4B. By supporting a co-funding model, funders are able to access enhanced value and impact from limited resource input. This is achieved both by meeting rigorous indicators and output targets set by A4B, as well as meeting AHRC aims through funding to deliver KE outcomes from funding.

Targets need to be allied together and not contrary. The funding provided by A4B, being from a European source, has provided geographical direction to the project targets. Targets are useful but most appropriate when the targeted areas have a vibrant creative industries sector. There is a potential 'problem' that the more vibrant areas (e.g. Cardiff) are not counted as targets and therefore some of the potential impact is lost.

However, the focus on European convergence areas makes it possible to reach areas that are not such 'quick wins', providing further impact from the funding that is provided as part of the project.

### 3. Early career researchers

We found that CEWN has been more appropriate for early-mid career academics. Partly through our Creative Crucible scheme, which was aimed directly at early career academics, we have engaged more effectively with a number of younger, innovative academics who are looking at the first stages on the funding ladder. Informal discussions with attendees indicate that the incentive for early-mid career academics is important, as it can relieve pressure on teaching loads if research income is forthcoming.

#### **4. Learning from KE events**

During 2013-13 we held three KE events. These can have surprising dynamics, with some people clearly emerging as leaders or dominant characters. There is a clear role for facilitators in reining in excessive or dominant behaviour in order to facilitate genuine and effective knowledge exchange. The law of two feet – that people can use their two feet to find a place in a meeting where you can best contribute and add value—needs to be encouraged by facilitators so that participants are not static after an initial round of ideas creation.

KE events do not always work as expected. As with experience of RCUK sandpits, the participants need to be lucky to find the right people at the right time and with the right ideas. We have found that there are a number of projects that are developed by attendees after the event; some are developed 'on the train home' after an event as new partnerships are discovered and discussed. Some are 'remote' partnerships that emerge through email and other communication but which spark interesting collaborations.

#### **5. Mentoring to develop projects.**

Our experience has indicated that there is a great deal of importance attached to mentoring in order to develop projects. Informal peer review has been an integral part of the project manager's role, providing feedback on projects as they emerge from the initial development phase at KE events.

Finding and engaging business partners has been a key role, and brokering interactions that will lead to successful proposal submissions. It is not uncommon for a project manager to assist in the collation or writing of a proposal, given the difficulties faced by some academics in finding time to complete funding applications in a short period of time.

The project manager has a role in mentoring projects through the development phase, to take account of a number of issues including eligibility, finances, and university authorisation and submission mechanisms. Learning and understanding these processes is particularly important for early career researchers, as there is a limited knowledge of the university systems.

We have found that it is important to make sure that there is ownership of each emerging project. At the end of a knowledge exchange event, it needs to be clearly signposted as to who the lead bid writer will be, and to ensure timely input into any proposal.

CEWN has learned to keep the application process as light touch as possible, so that applicants are not put off by lengthy applications. Similarly, the light-tough review of projects has been encouraged for steering group members to have the opportunity to input into the review process.

#### **6. Legacy and sustainability**

CEWN funding is limited, and so there are always some successful and some unsuccessful applicants. This leads to some degree of disappointment when project proposals not funded. We have learned that there needs to be follow-up with unsuccessful applicants and to assist in the development of alternative project ideas. It is useful to have access to a set of funding streams as alternatives to CEWN funding.

It has been important to build sustainability into each project proposal that is submitted to CEWN. With such a small funding amount available, we regard it as a seed-corn fund that will grow into much bigger projects given the right research outcomes. This further development has to be built into the project, providing sustainability and long-term outcomes. Without this, it is more difficult to approach funders to support projects that do not have the possibility of creating long-term impact.

## 7. Incentives to participate

We have found that being upfront about the availability of funding support for KE research is crucial. For most people it is the incentive to attend and acts as a draw for businesses. However, it should not be the only reason to attend a KE event. Events also need to have a networking and meeting element to them, in order to provide a range of incentives for attendance.

Careful consideration of themes has also provided a tempting 'offer' for participants to attend. We had a significant indicator that heritage is a vibrant theme, due to the demand for places at our event. However, Creative Industries, Health and wellbeing also encouraged a diverse yet focused set of participants that were attempting to generate research niches in hitherto less explored academic territory.

## 8. Working as part of a team

CEWN has demonstrated that it is possible for universities to work together, to develop a collaborative approach to knowledge exchange with Creative Industries. This requires input from all parties; in particular, input from the research and commercial offices/officers in each institution has been very significant in providing support for the project and its activities. The steering group have a role to play in developing and managing the project. This is particularly important for ensuring buy-in to the process at an institutional level.

Our experience indicates that the project manager needs to be multi-skilled, taking on both an administrative and academic role. This is particularly important if participants are to get substantive support in developing proposals.

## What for the future?

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Our experience clearly indicates that KE with Creative Industries has a future in Wales, but we are aware of some limitations to our process and what we can achieve. With a small funding pot we have barely scratched the surface, but we have found that projects such as CEWN are able to help fill a 'gap' identified by for Creative England (Channer, Owens and Lee 2013).

CEWN's next step will further scope and analyses results of the Creative Canvas exercise. This was originally envisaged as an audit of Wales' Creative Industries. Together with the Welsh government, we are identifying cultural and practical barriers to KE with between HE and Creative businesses that will influence KE across Wales.

As well as learning from best practice, we aim to develop a 'hub' format for KE with Creative Industries in Wales. Developing and sustaining a larger and longer-term KE support mechanism will allow innovation to flourish in Wales, building on the success of CEWN. Continuing with the co-funding strategy, and engaging with key anchor companies in the Welsh Creative Industries sector, we will be working to produce a viable hub proposal.

## References

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Channer, J; Owens, P; and Lee, C (2013) *Connecting and growing creative businesses through engagement with higher education institutions*. Creative England, 2013. Available online at <http://www.creativeengland.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

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<sup>i</sup> A4B is a six year programme of support funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and European Structural Funds aimed at providing a simplified, integrated package of support for knowledge transfer from academia to business.