

1 The Implementation and Refinement of a National Institute for Physical Activity, Health and  
2 Sport

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24

25 [Abstract](#)

26 **Background:** Recognition of the importance and value of collaboration and involving  
27 stakeholders throughout the research process has given rise to the establishment of the  
28 [Welsh Institute for Physical Activity, Health and Sport \(WIPAHS\)](#). Globally, formal  
29 collaborations between researchers and stakeholders to complete research projects, remains  
30 insufficient. Therefore, the primary aim of WIPAHS is to engage in long-term, forward-  
31 thinking collaborations that address practice-informed research questions, to disseminate  
32 findings widely, and translate them into practice and policy. This study explored the  
33 implementation and subsequent refinement of a national institute for physical activity,  
34 health, and sport. **Methods:** Through a qualitative exploratory design, thirteen, individual,  
35 semi-structured, online interviews were conducted with academic members of the WIPAHS  
36 Research Steering Group. The data were thematically analysed by the research team to  
37 identify themes and subsequently used to formulate a set of Principles of Working. **Results:**  
38 Fifteen sub-themes were generated which led to eight Principles of Working emphasising  
39 national unity and the commitment to working collaboratively across all of Wales, UK, for the  
40 benefit of Wales. The role of collaboration in amplifying real-world impact was particularly  
41 highlighted; collaborative efforts between academics and stakeholders, underpinned by a  
42 clear structure and equal opportunities, were believed to facilitate a reduction in research  
43 duplication and optimal efficiency. **Conclusion:** Formalising the developmental process and  
44 the resulting Principles of Working provides a replicable blueprint for other academics to  
45 consider creating similar national institutes. This approach enables co-ordinated, systems-  
46 wide efforts to promote and advance health-enhancing physical activity and sport, offering a  
47 model for others seeking a comprehensive approach to achieve these goals.

48 *Keywords: Co-development, translational, policy, practice, nationwide, whole-systems*

49           1. Background

50

51   Research partnerships yielding collaborations between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)  
52   can build capacity for knowledge exchange and translation;[1] such endeavours offer valuable  
53   insights for addressing and resolving localised challenges.[2] Whilst the barriers hindering  
54   collaborations between HEIs and non-academic stakeholders (e.g. community, industry) have  
55   been explored, a stronger emphasis has been placed on developing inter-university teaching  
56   and learning collaborations than research. Stemming from the triple-helix model to research  
57   (university, industry, and government),[3] notable barriers for HEIs collaborating with non-  
58   academic stakeholders include: the concern that industry-related research may not align  
59   sufficiently with academic standards, such as ethics approval processes, posing challenges to  
60   publishing;[4] bureaucracy within HEIs (i.e. contract and legal negotiations);[5] the physical  
61   proximity and language barriers that researchers face,[6] albeit now partially mitigated by  
62   technological advances; and, specifically within health research, concerns about impact and  
63   translation, or how to bridge-the-gap between research production and implementation.[7]

64

65   In 2021, Universities Wales, a committee representing the interests of the eight HEIs in Wales,  
66   United Kingdom (UK), cited a requirement for Welsh Universities to create formal  
67   arrangements under which they could collaborate in research and innovation.[8] This  
68   requirement significantly aligned with the ethos of the Welsh Institute of Physical Activity,  
69   Health and Sport ([WIPAHS](#)), established in 2019, to: i) enhance collaborative research capacity  
70   across Wales, beyond that of academia, including research with stakeholders; ii) promote the  
71   health benefits associated with sport and physical activity; and iii) facilitate the translation of  
72   research and evaluation findings to tangible individual and societal impacts; with the overall

73 mission being to reduce inequalities in physical activity, health and sport, and increase  
74 physical activity levels, and subsequently health outcomes, in Wales. Currently (2024), the  
75 WIPAHS Research Steering Group (RSG) is comprised of University Representatives from all  
76 eight Welsh HEIs, and eight Strategic Theme Leads, made up of academics and practitioners,  
77 who are experts in their fields, ranging from policy to behaviour change, through to mental  
78 health and well-being; this multi-disciplinary composition of WIPAHS facilitates the transfer  
79 of knowledge and promotes multi-disciplinary work[9] (organisational structure available in  
80 Supplementary File 1.) The RSG works with stakeholders at all stages of research, to support  
81 and promote true collaboration, sharing authority and accountability throughout the entirety  
82 of the project. Relevant stakeholders should be actively engaged in HEI collaborations  
83 throughout the research process to help identify priorities, understand the problems being  
84 explored, and devise creative solutions.[10] With representatives from Sport Wales, Welsh  
85 Government and Public Health Wales on the Strategic Management Board (SMB), WIPAHS  
86 receives direction in line with the nations priorities and has a direct route into influencing  
87 practice and policy.

88

89 Whilst there is a plethora of examples of collaborations within research at an individual study  
90 level, such practices remain unexplored at a pan-institution level. To effectively learn how to  
91 develop partnerships and collaborations which yield positive outcomes at local, national, and  
92 global levels, and are primarily guided by non-economic motives,[11] it is imperative that  
93 interdisciplinary collaborative experiences are drawn upon.[12] Knowledge and  
94 understanding surrounding collaboration ideology, including their design and  
95 implementation, is sparse.[13,14] Despite the high value placed on national and non-  
96 academic sector collaborations,[15] researchers rarely consider the formation of, and

97 ongoing developments from, their collaborations.[16] Therefore, the aim of this study was to:  
98 i) gather WIPAHS RSG members expert opinions on the formation and implementation of a  
99 national research collaboration; and ii) to develop a set of guiding Principles of Working.

100

## 101 2. Materials and Methods

### 102 2.1 Study Design and Participants

103

104 Using a qualitative exploratory design, semi-structured, online, individual interviews were  
105 conducted with members of the WIPAHS RSG (n=13; 62% female). Participants were  
106 purposively recruited, via email, to take part based on their membership of the RSG (i.e. either  
107 as a HEI representative or as a Strategic Theme Lead). Therefore, the sample number reflects  
108 the number of people on the RSG at the time of the data collection (2022), excluding one  
109 Strategic Theme Lead and the chair of the RSG. Participant roles within WIPAHS or their  
110 employing HEIs are not reported alongside quotations to protect anonymity, as the small  
111 number of individuals in these positions could make them easily identifiable; further details  
112 of their roles are publicly available via the WIPAHS website and annual report. The interviews  
113 were conducted by a WIPAHS researcher (CAS) within the first three weeks of them starting  
114 their role at WIPAHS to minimise familiarity bias. The interviews were conducted and  
115 recorded using an online video conferencing software (Zoom Video Communications, San  
116 Jose, CA). One-hour slots were arranged with each participant to conduct the interview.  
117 Informed written consent and additional verbal consent were obtained prior to study  
118 commencement. The interview guide (Supplementary File 2) was designed by two  
119 researchers (CAS and JS) and refined following preliminary testing with two WIPAHS

120 members. The guide was developed to explore the perceptions and experiences of  
121 participants in relation to their role and responsibilities within WIPAHS. Key areas of  
122 discussion included initial involvement with WIPAHS, thoughts on the structure and mission  
123 of WIPAHS, and overall perceptions. Institutional Research Ethics Committee approval was  
124 obtained from Swansea University (JS\_01-09-21).

125

### 126 2.3 Data Analysis

127

128 Interviews were transcribed using the automated transcriber on Zoom© (Zoom Video  
129 Communications, San Jose, CA), in line with approval from IT services and institutional ethics,  
130 but were also manually checked, cleaned, and anonymised. The generated data were  
131 thematically analysed, drawing on the six-step approach outlined by Braun and Clarke.[17,18]  
132 An inductive, data-driven, approach was used, facilitated by familiarisation, reading and re-  
133 reading the transcripts, and noting any data that was repetitive, novel, or related to previous  
134 research. NVivo 12© (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia) was used by the first author  
135 (ABR) to code the data and generate sub-themes. On completion of sub-theme coding, to  
136 enhance rigor, credibility, and transparency,[19] a second author (RLK), also repeatedly read  
137 the transcripts, acted as a 'critical friend' to reflexively discuss, and challenge the generated  
138 sub-themes. This latter step was also important as all members of the study team had links  
139 to, and pre-existing knowledge of, WIPAHS, and therefore this step ensured that researcher  
140 bias did not influence generated sub-themes. Where required, codes and sub-themes were  
141 mapped back to the original data and refined in a recursive manner until an accurate and true  
142 representation was ensured. Following further collaborative discussion with the study team

143 (KAM and MAM), two authors (ABR and RLK) mapped the generated sub-themes into higher-  
 144 level themes, which have been termed 'Principles of Working'.

145

146 **3 Findings**

147

148 Fifteen sub-themes were generated, further refined, and synthesised into a set of eight  
 149 Principles of Working of equal importance. Subsequent discussion of the findings are  
 150 structured around these Principles and illustrated by direct quotes from the interviews.

151

152 INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

153

154 *Table 1: Codes, sub-themes and subsequent higher-level themes termed Principles of Working*

<b>Principle of Working (Higher-Level Theme)</b>	<b>Sub Theme</b>	<b>Code</b>
Smart Research, Solid Structure: Minimizing Duplication, Maximizing Efficiency.	Reduction of Duplication	Reduce duplication of research
	Structure	Theme lead role
		Researcher role
		HEI lead role
		ECR contribution
	Cross-discipline	
Empower Research for Real-World Change: Make it Community-Driven, Make an Impact!	Real-World Impact	Translation of research
		Knowledge exchange
		Real world impact
		Dissemination
		Community-driven
	Policy	Policy
		Future Gen Act
External Partners	External partners	
	Sport Wales/PHW/Welsh Gov	

Stakeholder Synergy: Partnering with a shared purpose.	Stakeholders	Stakeholder
Equal Footing, Empowered Voices: Championing Opportunity for All	Equal Voice	More vocal, everyone heard
		Equality (everyone heard) (for all)
	Equal Opportunities	Opportunities
		Open Involvement
		Project Allocation
National Unity: Working across Wales, for Wales.	Nationwide	EOI's
		Country distribution
		Pan-Wales
	Welsh Focus	Welsh
		Relevance to Wales
Unlocking Potential through Collaboration: Amplifying Our Impact.	Promotion of Collaboration	Research Questions
		Collaboration
		Transparency
		Co-Production
		Different strengths/weaknesses (of different universities)
	Greater Impact	Sharing
		Disconnect/conflict between organisations
		Impact – bigger from collab working – publications/funding
		Benefit for researchers
		What's in it for us?
Clear Mission, Infinite Horizons: Pioneering the Visionary Journey	Future Vision	Specific Objectives
		Future Vision
	Mission	Mission
An Iterative Cyclic Process of Dynamic Listening: Identifying Challenges and Taking Action	Potential Challenges	Time constraints
		Personal Agenda
		Recognition
		Funding
		WIPS Confusion
		Awareness of WIPAHS
		Perceived Swansea Based
		Size of WIPAHS
Sustainability		

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157 3.1 Principle 1: Smart Research, Solid Structure: Minimising Duplication, Maximising

158 Efficiency

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160 This principle amalgamated two themes: 'Structure' and 'Reduction of Duplication'. Having a  
161 solid, well-defined, comprehensive structure, of both the institute itself and how it operates,  
162 which is understood by all members, was considered essential to enhance operational  
163 efficiency and minimise research duplication. Reducing duplication and not *'reinventing the*  
164 *wheel, if something's already done'* (Participant 8) was also a stand-alone discussion topic.  
165 Participants cited that a key strength was that WIPAHS aims to reduce research duplication  
166 through actively raising research activity awareness across the HEIs through scheduled,  
167 formalised discussions alluding to the *"removal of competing projects which are*  
168 *underpowered and can't answer the research questions... so making our work more efficient"*  
169 (Participant 6). Moving from duplication of small, isolated studies, towards collaborative,  
170 larger-scale, more robust, and higher-powered studies, will not only enable additional  
171 expertise but account for inter-geographical area and demographical nuances.

172

### 173 3.2 Principle 2: Empower Research for Real-World Change: Make it Community- 174 Driven, Make an Impact!

175

176 This principle reflects two themes: 'Real-World Impact' and 'Policy'. Participants  
177 unequivocally articulated the need for WIPAHS to get *"academics to understand how the*  
178 *research will translate into the real-world"* (Participant 1) and how real-world impact should  
179 be *"the heart of what we do... almost all of the work that WIPAHS does has got to be based*  
180 *on the idea that it's going to go into the real world... we always ultimately should be thinking,*  
181 *how will that translate into practice"* (Participant 1); with this being achieved by providing  
182 tangible, practical benefits for collaborators and stakeholders through to increased influence

183 on policy. Indeed, *“given the vision, we need to be listening to the needs of our communities.*  
184 *Those are the real novel issues”* (Participant 7). This emphasis on listening and responding to  
185 community needs reinforces how WIPAHs's influence on policy can be strengthened by  
186 prioritising issues that resonate within these communities, ensuring that research outputs not  
187 only inform policy but also reflect, and address, the lived experiences and priorities of those  
188 affected.

189

### 190 3.3 Principle 3: Stakeholder Synergy: Partnering with a Shared Purpose

191

192 Participants stressed the value of connecting directly with *“external stakeholders to make*  
193 *sure what we do is relevant to them”* (Participant 13), to understand their insight needs, draw  
194 on their experiences to inform the approach, and support translation into practice and thus  
195 impact. Participants highlighted the need to be *“engaging stakeholders to really ensure we’re*  
196 *looking at the right things and having an impact”* and *“asking the right questions in the right*  
197 *ways and having the right people involved in the research”* (Participant 2). Collaborations  
198 should endeavour to *“bridge the gap... a little bit more between these stakeholders and*  
199 *academia”* (Participant 5) and other sectors (e.g. private sector, public sector) to incorporate  
200 a wider range of partnerships; with people from multiple sectors collaborating on topics of  
201 interest. Indeed, WIPAHs has integrated members over time and has representatives from  
202 Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, and Sport Wales on the Strategic Management  
203 Board, giving researchers the opportunity to widely disseminate research and translate this  
204 into meaningful outcomes through these bodies.

205 3.4 Principle 4: Equal Footing, Empowered Voices: Championing Opportunity for All

206

207 This principle is derived from the theme ‘Equal Opportunities’, reflecting aspects such as  
208 equality, opportunities, open involvement and project allocation. Deemed paramount within  
209 this principle was the importance of being *“super transparent... super open and fair”*  
210 (Participant 10) when communicating opportunities presented or identified by WIPAHS, and  
211 any decisions made. Whilst it was acknowledged that *“not every university is going to be able*  
212 *to contribute to every piece of work that is offered, but as long as there’s the opportunity that*  
213 *they can”* (Participant 13) regardless of HEI size or geographical location, *“enabling a voice for*  
214 *all”* (Participant 12), and thereby including non-academics, was fundamental.

215

216 3.5 Principle 5: National Unity: Working across Wales, For Wales

217

218 This principle was created from two themes: ‘Nationwide’ and ‘Welsh Focus’. The discussion  
219 highlighted the uniqueness of a pan-Wales network operating at a national level where  
220 *“geographical spread... allows for a broader reach in terms of research and representation*  
221 *within research so that it reflects the entirety of Wales”* (Participant 14) was emphasised,  
222 along with how to effectively harness the power of collaboration across Wales, to benefit the  
223 population. A predominant feeling that *“collectively, theoretically, we should be stronger as a*  
224 *collaboration”* (Participant 5) ensued and that *“rather than work in sort of isolation and*  
225 *independently from one another... we can work so much better and have better results that*  
226 *demonstrate what Wales can do, what Wales can offer”* (Participant 13). It was also believed  
227 that consolidating localised knowledge and skills, drawing on the *“great amount of expertise,*

228 *creativity in innovativeness across universities in Wales*” (Participant 13) improved the work  
229 undertaken, and that there was value in exploring how to *“publish stuff that is actually*  
230 *relevant to Wales and then try and see whether we can make wider parallels and*  
231 *recommendations for... the societies that are similar to Wales*” (Participant 11). Thereby, the  
232 work extends to having *“more international audiences... that could potentially have a*  
233 *straightaway much bigger impact for Wales*” (Participant 11), facilitating international  
234 comparability and collaboration.

235

### 236 3.6 Principle 6: Unlocking Potential through Collaboration: Amplifying Our Impact

237

238 Participants felt that the ‘Promotion of collaboration’ between researchers, practitioners,  
239 policy-makers and the community was unique within WIPAHS and much needed in the scope  
240 of Higher Education and research more generally. Whilst *“WIPAHS is brilliant”* (Participant 7)  
241 in fostering early signs of a collaborative culture amongst the HEIs, with the initial indications  
242 of the advantages of collaboration evident, some participants voiced concerns and caution  
243 that *“people don’t run away and take advantage of”* (Participant 7) sharing and owning  
244 research ideas. Moreover, partnering with researchers and stakeholders across Wales  
245 resonated positively with many, identifying opportunities extending beyond networking, to  
246 maximise the impact of WIPAHS and, indeed, enabling individual researchers *“to engage in*  
247 *applied research and have a wider impact over and above what [they] could do on [their] own”*  
248 (Participant 7), generating more higher-quality outputs from collaborative endeavours.  
249 Overall, WIPAHS was perceived as *“pulling together... the body of researchers in Wales”* and  
250 being a *“vehicle to try and pull things together in a more strategic, coherent way”* (Participant

251 10), whether that was by *“putting in grants or working on publications, so that we can have*  
252 *an impact on public health policy”* (Participant 14). Ultimately, the transparent WIPAHS model  
253 of collaboration can facilitate higher quality research endeavours, and thus greater impact,  
254 on the health and well-being of Wales.

255

### 256 3.7 Principle 7: Clear Mission: Pioneering the Visionary Journey

257

258 The concept of the ‘mission’ of WIPAHS was discussed in the interviews, with in-depth  
259 conversations revolving around specific objectives and future visions. This dialogue was  
260 guided by interview questions regarding the direction and sustainability of WIPAHS. The  
261 consensus that WIPAHS’ *“purpose largely focused on physical activity”* (Participant 8) was  
262 expanded by views that it was also about *“making a difference and trying to influence*  
263 *collaborations across Wales”* (Participant 9). Whilst others highlighted the WIPAHS’ mission  
264 as being *“to generate the evidence base for what is actually happening with physical activity”*  
265 in Wales and the *“impact on people’s ability to thrive and flourish”* (Participant 7). Emphasis  
266 was placed on the requirement to transparently communicate, and, where necessary,  
267 reinforce the ‘mission’ to ensure that the remit of WIPAHS remained aligned, minimising any  
268 divergence towards individual endeavours, and those of the respective HEIs that may  
269 potentially confound WIPAHS’ overarching ‘mission,’ potentially due to employment being  
270 through the HEIs and involvement in WIPAHS being on a voluntary role basis, *“I’m conscious*  
271 *that I don’t want my personal agenda to influence the agenda of [WIPAHS]”* (Participant 14).

272

273 3.8 Principle 8: An Iterative Process of Dynamic Listening: Identifying Challenges and  
274 Taking Action

275

276 This principle was created from discussions around acknowledging the ‘Potential Challenges’  
277 that WIPAHS faces, both as a network and from the perspective of the individuals involved  
278 with WIPAHS; highlighting the need to engage in an iterative process of actively listening to,  
279 and addressing, concerns to ensure continued progress. Such challenges included time  
280 constraints and funding availability: *“I think it's always hard when people volunteer for roles  
281 and there's no payments... so you are relying on goodwill”* (Participant 12); awareness of  
282 WIPAHS and ensuring its long-term sustainability: *“I would like to see some targets and  
283 objectives for what we want from the research; what do we want to see from research and  
284 the next five years. I'd like to see it [WIPAHS] just really widely known, I'd like to see it just  
285 everyone knowing about it, and everyone linking to it”* (Participant 1).

286

287 4 DISCUSSION

288

289 This study sought to involve WIPAHS members in a formative process to inform the ongoing  
290 development of a national institute of physical activity, health, and sport. The results yielded  
291 a guiding set of eight essential Principles of Working, which are crucial for informing the  
292 continuous growth, and indeed the successful establishment of other similar national entities.  
293 Principles revolved around: transparency, openness, collaboration, maximising real-world  
294 impact, engaging stakeholders, minimising research duplication, and fostering national unity.

295

396 Considering the first Principle of Working, participants discussed WIPAHS' role in encouraging  
397 the sharing of data, methodologies, and findings, to reduce duplication and promote greater  
398 efficiency within research. Duplication of research not only consumes valuable time and  
399 funding but also delays scientific progress, whereas collaboration enhances research  
300 productivity.[20] By fostering a culture of co-ordination and collaboration, researchers and  
301 institutions can consolidate their collective expertise and resources[21] to address critical  
302 research questions more effectively and allocate research funding more efficiently;[22] whilst  
303 reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies.[23]

304

305 Naturally, some of the Principles of Working overlapped, such as Principles Two and Three,  
306 regarding having a real-world impact and the importance of stakeholders, which, according  
307 to Brownson et al. [24], is where the true value of research is realised (i.e. translating research  
308 into tangible benefits for society). Working with stakeholders is crucial as it increases the  
309 likelihood that research outcomes have real-world relevance, through integrated knowledge  
310 translation [25]; but is not without bureaucratic challenges [5]. The interviews highlighted  
311 stakeholders as key to the WIPAHS network, due to their ability to bring valuable insight and  
312 real-world questions that need solutions. Indeed, Kothari et al. [26] identified stakeholders as  
313 key to enhancing the quality and applicability of research findings, practical knowledge, and  
314 contextual expertise to the research process. This is exemplified by numerous WIPAHS  
315 projects, available in the WIPAHS Annual Reports, such as a recent collaboration with a health  
316 board to investigate healthcare professionals' approaches to promoting physical activity in a  
317 clinical paediatric population (Supplementary File 3). The findings have been shared with the  
318 stakeholder, who is now co-ordinating discussions across Wales to streamline and standardise  
319 these practices nationwide. Engaging stakeholders with real-world questions fosters a

320 reciprocal relationship, where researchers address community-identified priorities and  
321 challenges, and stakeholders gain confidence in academic findings to drive meaningful  
322 change.

323

324 Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are central to a functioning society,[27] which are  
325 reflected in Principle Four. Equal access and participation in a network enables individuals  
326 from various backgrounds to contribute their unique perspectives and experiences, leading  
327 to the enrichment of ideas and solutions.[28] Furthermore, equitable networks strengthen  
328 social cohesion.[29] In essence, the provision of equal opportunities within networks should  
329 reflect a thriving research network. Central to the effectiveness of WIPAHS' work is the  
330 assurance of adequate representation, ensuring that outcomes are not only translatable but  
331 also reflective of the entire population. Ultimately, the principles of EDI within WIPAHS are  
332 the foundation of our commitment for, and use of, collaboration within research, to hear the  
333 voices of the people in Wales. Integral to this, is providing a national approach within the  
334 network; pan-Wales working is of paramount importance for the collective well-being of the  
335 people of Wales (Principle Five). Such an approach allows for the efficient utilisation of  
336 resources and expertise (highlighted in Principle One), promoting the development of  
337 consistent and co-ordinated strategies that can benefit individuals and communities across  
338 the country.[30] A national network can help in addressing common challenges [31] and  
339 harnessing collective strengths, whilst encouraging inclusivity and promoting a sense of  
340 shared research identity.[32] Ultimately, the national approach encompassed by WIPAHS  
341 strives to create a more prosperous, equitable, and harmonious Wales for all its residents.[33]  
342 The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act[33] outlines five ways of working:  
343 Integration, Collaboration, Involvement, Prevention and Long-Term. The findings from this

344 study indicate that WIPAHS actively aligns with these principles, demonstrating a  
345 commitment to fostering a positive and enduring impact on future generations.

346

347 This study demonstrated that collaboration is highly valued and plays a pivotal role in  
348 advancing knowledge across various disciplines and enabling greater impacts to be realised,  
349 as encompassed within Principle Six. A collaborative approach, if done well, facilitates the  
350 exchange of diverse perspectives, expertise, and ideas to enrich the research process[34]  
351 including greater levels of dissemination and subsequent impact, through co-authorship  
352 outputs.[35] However, a pan-national, multi-HEI collaboration does not go without its  
353 challenges, such as coordinating efforts across HEIs with differing priorities and resources,  
354 managing communication among diverse teams, and aligning goals and expectations[36].  
355 However, the development and formalisation of collaborations, such as WIPAHS, provides a  
356 unique and powerful opportunity for individuals and HEIs to leverage their strengths leading  
357 to more comprehensive approaches to solving complex societal issues.[37]

358

359 In accord with George et al. [38] participants identified that, whilst they have a shared vision  
360 within WIPAHS, clear objectives are needed to ensure the mission of WIPAHS is not lost, as  
361 reflected in Principle Seven. Having a clear mission and well-defined objectives within a  
362 network are crucial for guiding its purpose, focus, and actions effectively.[38] Clarity in  
363 objectives provides a shared understanding of the network aims, enabling members to align  
364 their efforts and resources, and ensuring that everyone is working towards a common  
365 vision.[38] Indeed, WIPAHS has continued to evolve since the interviews, and now consults  
366 the Strategic Management Board to ensure that the WIPAHS vision and mission remains

367 aligned to the key goals and activities of Public Health Wales, Welsh Government and Sport  
368 Wales.

369

370 This is the first study to explore the creation and refinement of a national institute of physical  
371 activity, health, and sport. The qualitative, online interviews allowed for a greater insight into  
372 the implementation and ongoing development of WIPAHS. However, the study is not without  
373 limitations. There was an inherent potential for social desirability bias as the researcher who  
374 conducted the interviews (CAS) was also part of the WIPAHS working group. Nonetheless, this  
375 was mitigated by several measures, including: i) the interviews being conducted only three  
376 weeks into the researchers WIPAHS role; ii) by having an *a priori* interview guide, ensuring  
377 anonymity and confidentiality in the reporting; iii) the inclusion of a critical friend (a  
378 researcher who supported in data analysis; RLK); and iv) the affording of equal importance to  
379 the themes and codes triangulated from each interview data set.[39] Whilst the study  
380 focussed on the academic collaborations within WIPAHS, thereby restricting the sample size,  
381 this has enabled a thorough understanding of the dynamics, strengths and challenges of such  
382 collaborations, which, in future research, can be verified and built upon with stakeholders.

383

## 384 **Conclusion**

385 In conclusion, WIPAHS exemplifies an innovative model for addressing complex challenges in  
386 research collaboration and knowledge translation. By formalising a pan-Wales approach,  
387 WIPAHS unites diverse academic institutions and stakeholders to establish a clear structure  
388 that seeks to minimise research waste, fosters equal opportunities, and amplifies real-world  
389 impact. Its Principles of Working reflect a commitment to national unity and inclusive

390 collaboration, ensuring that research questions are community-driven and needed in the  
391 'real-world.' WIPAHS' unique design, built on systems-wide collaboration, has transformed  
392 traditional research practices into a co-ordinated effort for societal betterment. The findings  
393 from this study offer a replicable framework for developing similar national institutes,  
394 providing actionable insights into overcoming challenges in collaboration and creating  
395 enduring impact across regions and disciplines.

396

### 397 [List of Abbreviations](#)

398

399 The Welsh Institute of Physical Activity, Health and Sport (WIPAHS)

400 Higher Education Institution (HEI)

401 United Kingdom (UK)

402 Research Steering Group (RSG)

403

### 404 [Declarations](#)

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### 406 [Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate](#)

407

408 The research project was approved by Swansea University, Institutional Research Ethics

409 Committee in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval code: JS\_01-09-21. As

410 per the ethical approval, all participants provided both written and verbal consent, prior to

411 their participation in the study.

412

### 413 [Consent for Publication](#)

414 Not applicable

## 415 Availability of Data and Materials

416

417 Full interview transcripts cannot be provided, due to identifiable data, despite being  
418 anonymised; descriptions of locations and activities mean that the participants could  
419 potentially be identified.

## 420 Competing Interests

421

422 The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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## 427 Author Contributions

428

429 MAM, JS and KAM contributed to the conception of the study and study design along with  
430 CAS. CAS completed the data collection. ABR conducted the formal analyses with secondary  
431 assistance and critical interpretation from RLK. ABR drafted the original version of the  
432 manuscript. All authors contributed to the interpretation of the results, reviewed, and  
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434

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