

# **Welsh Government**

## **Research in Practice Project Placement Proposal**

### **Data analysis of peer relationships using data from the School Health Research Network (SHRN)**

#### **Summary of project**

This is an exciting opportunity to do a placement at the heart of Welsh Government. This internship will produce evidence to help inform the development of policy interventions to support children and young people's well-being. This project involves new analysis of existing quantitative data on young people's peer relationships, including friendships and bullying. The successful applicant will work closely with Welsh Government officials and stakeholders to research, analyse data, produce a report, and prepare for briefing of Ministers and officials, and for publication of findings. The applicant will have the opportunity to apply research skills in a policy environment, further develop generic skills and to enhance their knowledge of research outside academia.

#### **About Welsh Government Research in Practice Placements**

The Welsh Government is the devolved Government for Wales with responsibility for the economy, education, transport, health and the Welsh NHS, business, public services and the environment of Wales.

A placement in Welsh Government offers a unique opportunity to work alongside policy officials and researchers, applying your research skills in a live policy environment. You'll have the opportunity to develop a range of research skills while deepening your understanding of how evidence shapes decision-making in Welsh Government.

The placement will be based alongside the members of the [Government Social Research \(GSR\) profession](#). GSR provides high-quality analytical advice and independent evidence to inform key policy decisions. Their work supports the full policy cycle—from understanding and development through to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Placement students will also contribute to wider efforts to support policy colleagues in shaping and delivering effective policy.

#### **The Project**

## **Data analysis of peer relationships using data from the School Health Research Network (SHRN)**

### *Background*

The [All-Age Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2035](#) highlights how relationships with peers significantly shape children's ability to cope with stress, make good decisions, and engage with their communities. Friendships are seen as fundamental building blocks of mental health. The mental health strategy prioritizes early, seamless access to support for emotional challenges stemming from peer issues. This project will analyse both primary and secondary school data to understand when issues emerge and how peer relationships develop over the course of childhood and adolescence.

The [Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being Framework](#), which is statutory guidance for all schools and settings in Wales, underpins every aspect of well-being and mental health provision. It emphasises creating a positive school environment where strong relationships, a sense of belonging, and inclusive practices are embedded throughout daily life. Schools are expected to implement the framework by fostering supportive peer and staff relationships, promoting emotional literacy, and ensuring that well-being complements the curriculum. This project will also consider whether schools are meeting these expectations in practice and how these principles influence pupils' experiences and outcomes.

The [Curriculum for Wales](#) embeds emotional well-being, social skills, and active citizenship, promoting peer interaction as essential to learning and development. Prevention is better than cure: the Welsh strategic approach seeks to empower children and schools to build supportive peer networks before bullying happens. The intention of this research is to understand the positive peer relationships that children are already fostering, as well as challenges such as bullying and isolation. Welsh Government will publish updated [Rights, Respect, Equality Anti-Bullying Guidance](#) in early 2026. This guidance promotes the development of positive and respectful peer relationships in schools. It seeks to embed these values in the school environment to foster belonging, empathy, and mutual respect.

This project will complement other current work such as the Estyn thematic review on healthy peer relationships, and the research Welsh Government hopes to commission on primary school peer-on-peer relationships. It will also build on previous reports such as [Estyn's 2021 report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment in](#)

secondary schools, and the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan's recommendations regarding bullying. The researcher is expected to incorporate understanding of existing research on the subject, such as Donaldson et al.'s 2024 paper, 'Mental health, bullying and school connectedness: A comparative analysis of school transition at age 11 from within the Welsh education system' and Lereya et al.'s 2025 study of 'Bullying victimisation, self-esteem and perceived appearance among minoritised sexual and gender identities in adolescence'.

The School Health Research Network (SHRN) asks learners aged 7-16 a wide variety of health and well-being related questions to generate high quality evidence to support children and young people. You will use any relevant data from SHRN to compare quality of friendships, rates of bullying and cyberbullying, and related well-being measures across both primary and secondary school contexts. The research will examine whether particular periods or demographic groups show notable patterns. The report will discuss the policy implications of the evidence compiled, which will then be shared with the relevant policy officials and Welsh Government research teams.

*The internship:*

The intern will work with the Equity in Education division and two teams in KAS: Health and Social Care Research and Schools Research. The internship will require working closely with policy officials and social researchers and will provide an opportunity to apply research skills in a policy environment. It will also offer opportunity to further develop quantitative and generic skills (such as report writing and making presentations), and to enhance policy knowledge.

Interns will benefit from the experience of working closely with the Welsh Government:

- Gaining a better understanding of the world outside of academia and increasing employability, using their knowledge and skills to contribute to the work of the Welsh Government;
- Insight into the School Health Research Network (SHRN), which is a partnership between Welsh Government, Cardiff University, and Public Health Wales. Option to visit or exchange with the wider SHRN team to support collaboration and development of the work. Insight into this health and well-being dataset, partnership working and potential collaboration with partners;
- Opportunity to work with policy colleagues to consider how research findings may be applied to the Welsh policy context;
- Transferable skills and knowledge;
- Time management skills and;

- Report writing skills.

*Anticipated project outcomes:*

- Descriptive statistics and analysis of a range of aspects of peer relationships (including connection with friends, bullying, and peer problems) and how these vary by age, gender, and other demographic factors.
- Analysis of peer relationships controlling for variables such as age, gender, and family affluence in relation to health and well-being outcomes.
- A summary report of what we can understand about peer relationships among primary and secondary school learners from the existing SHRN data and implications for policy.
- A presentation of the findings to relevant policy and social research teams.
- Preparation of a report for publication on the Welsh Government website.
- Option to co-develop a research paper with SHRN DECIPHer academics for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

## What skills do we need

We welcome individuals who can bring the following skills and experience to the role:

- Quantitative data analysis skills, including ability to undertake a range of statistical, numerical, and analytical techniques (see table below) using appropriate software such as STATA, SPSS, R, or Python
- Strong evidence appraisal skills
- The ability to discuss with policy team to understand their needs and to carry out desk research and data analysis
- Ability to evaluate research findings and work with policy colleagues to consider how they may be applied
- Ability to produce concise, well written documents, presenting complex evidence in an accessible format

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|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Descriptive statistics      | Mean, median, mode, frequency tables, cross-tabulations             | Summarize and explore data                        |
| Data visualization          | Histograms, boxplots, scatterplots, bar charts                      | Identify patterns and distributions               |
| Data cleaning & preparation | Handling missing data, recoding variables, creating dummy variables | Prepare data for analysis                         |
| Inferential statistics      | T-tests, chi-square tests, anova                                    | Test group differences                            |
| Regression modelling        | Linear regression, logistic regression, multivariate regression     | Examine relationships and control for confounders |

|                       |   |                                   |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Multivariable control | Interaction terms, stratified analysis, propensity score matching | Adjust for age, gender, ses, etc. |
| Causal inference      | Longitudinal analysis, fixed effects, instrumental variables      | Strengthen causal claims          |

## Placement timescales

The placement will be for a period of 3 months. The placement is expected to start no earlier than April 2026.

The start date will be discussed with the successful applicant and there may be some flexibility dependent on individual circumstances.

## Funding and expenses

This opportunity is only open to students funded through the WGSSS Studentship scheme (awarded from October 2024 onwards) who are required to complete a Research in Practice placement. The placement is unpaid, however you will continue to receive your ESRC stipend. Welsh Government is not able to cover any relocation costs associated with the placement.

Reasonable travel and subsistence expenses incurred while carrying out placement-related activities may be claimed, subject to prior agreement with your placement supervisor and in line with the Welsh Government's Travel and Subsistence Policy

## Working arrangements

Welsh Government working hours are 37 hours per week, 7 hours 24 minutes per day on average. With prior agreement with the placement supervisor, you may be able to work flexible hours in accordance with Welsh Government practices. For students registered on a part-time studentship, this placement may be available on a part-time basis over a longer time frame, this would be negotiated between the Welsh Government and the successful applicant. If you would like to be considered on a part-time basis, please specify your preferred working hours on the application form.

It is anticipated that the successful applicant will work in a hybrid way between home and a Welsh Government office during their placement. This may change depending on Welsh Government policy. Any changes to working arrangements will be discussed with successful applicants.

## **Nationality requirements and security vetting**

Eligibility for taking up this placement in Welsh Government is dependent on meeting the [Civil Service Nationality rules](#). Please check that you are eligible before applying. Those who do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be able to take up a placement opportunity.

Successful applicants will be required to undergo Welsh Government's vetting procedures (which apply to temporary as well as permanent staff). This will involve the completion of a Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) application form and a Security Questionnaire.

## **Contacts**

For more information about this placement project, here are the contact details:

Freya Pryce [freya.pryce@gov.wales](mailto:freya.pryce@gov.wales)

If you require information about Research in Practice placement opportunities in Welsh Government please contact:

Katy Marrin and James Carey, Joint Head of GSR Workforce Planning and Professional Standards

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If you have any other queries about Research in Practice Placements please contact:

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