

Welsh Government

Research in Practice Project Placement Proposal

Measuring Wales' Soft Power: Evidence, Impacts and a Theory of Change for International Engagement

Summary of project

Wales's 2020 [International Strategy](#), set the tone for how the Welsh Government approaches global engagement; balancing values-led diplomacy, cultural exchange, economic opportunity, and global responsibility. Following elections in May, a new government will require a strategy refresh to reflect evolving priorities. Strengthening the evidence base will be essential to that process.

This PhD placement will support this with a literature review on soft power and its measurement, drawing on international best practice across governments, cultural institutions, and global organisations. The student will help scope a monitoring and evaluation framework by mapping existing Welsh Government data sources to understand what metrics already exist and where key gaps remain. Finally, the placement will contribute to developing a Theory of Change for Wales's soft power activity, clarifying how interventions translate into measurable outcomes and supporting future monitoring and evaluation.

This project offers a rare opportunity to shape strategic policy during a period of transition.

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 Measuring Wales' Soft Power – Evidence, Metrics and a Theory of Change for International Engagement

Summary of Policy Area and Context

Wales's first [International Strategy](#), published in 2020, established a distinct approach to global engagement built around three pillars: promoting Wales's values and identity, growing the economy through exports and investment, and increasing global responsibility. Since then, Wales's international footprint has evolved significantly, shaped by global events, major cultural moments, and an expanding portfolio of international partnerships.

With a new Welsh Government taking office following the Senedd elections on 8 May (and with an expanded Senedd bringing many newly elected Members who may be less familiar with previous work in this space) there will be a strong need for clear, accessible evidence to inform early ministerial decisions, particularly in the area often referred to as “soft power.”

Soft power encompasses Wales's cultural influence, reputation, relationships, and the perceptions of Wales internationally. Measuring these impacts is inherently challenging and often underdeveloped. This project will help strengthen the evidence base that informs decisions about international activity.

Project Aims and Objectives

The PhD placement will:

- Expand and synthesise a literature review on soft power and measurement.
- Map current Welsh Government data, indicators, and outputs relevant to soft power and international engagement.
- Identify evidence gaps and propose potential new metrics/ sources/ methods.
- Support the development of a high-level Theory of Change for Wales' soft power activity, linking interventions to short-, medium- and long-term outcomes.
- Provide insights to inform a refreshed international strategy for an incoming administration.

Methods

The project will use:

- Desk-based literature review and synthesis of academic, policy, and international comparative evidence.
- Evidence mapping and gap analysis of existing Welsh Government datasets, surveys, and indicators.
- Qualitative engagement with policy officials, analysts, and international partners (where appropriate).
- Contributions to developing a Theory of Change and supporting narrative.

Anticipated Outputs

- A consolidated soft power literature review.
- A mapped evidence baseline and gap assessment.
- A draft Theory of Change for Wales' international soft power work.
- Recommendations for future monitoring, indicators, and evaluation.
- Material to support ministerial advice for a new government.

This work will contribute directly to shaping the next phase of Wales' international strategy.

What skills do we need

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

- Strong analytical and research skills, particularly in evidence synthesis or literature review.
- Ability to work with qualitative and/or mixed-methods evidence.
- Clear, structured writing skills for policy audiences.
- Ability to break down complex concepts (e.g., soft power, cultural impact) into accessible analysis.
- Confidence in working independently and managing a self-directed research project.
- An interest in international policy, evaluation, or public policy design (prior knowledge is helpful but not essential).

Placement timescales

The placement will be for a period of 3 months. The expected start date would be no earlier than April 2025.

The start date will be discussed with the successful applicant and there would be 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:
Cerys.Ponting@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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