Welsh Graduate School for the Social Sciences (WGSSS)

Research in Practice (RinP) Placement

Host Placement Guidelines

Research in Practice (RinP) Placement is a professional development opportunity for Welsh Graduate School for the Social Sciences (WGSSS) postgraduate researchers, funded by the ESRC.

Through a Research in Practice placement, organisations can host a WGSSS postgraduate researcher (PhD student) to work on a project within their organisation for the equivalent of three months (13 weeks). Placements provide an opportunity for organisations to benefit from the knowledge, skills and fresh perspectives of a doctoral researcher, while supporting researchers to gain experience beyond academia and apply their research expertise in a different setting.

Placements are designed to deliver benefits for both the host organisation and the researcher. Projects may focus on areas such as research, evaluation, policy development, stakeholder engagement, organisational learning or service improvement.

This guidance provides information on the placement process, expectations of host organisations, and practical advice to help you make the most of the placement experience.

What is the process for hosting a placement?

Host organisations are asked to complete a placement proposal form, which will be reviewed by the WGSSS team to ensure it meets our expectations and ESRC guidelines. One reviewed, this document will be used to advertise your opportunity to our Postgraduate Researchers.

The pro forma template requests the following information:

- A description of the proposed project or activity
- Required skills and experience
- Placement location and format (in-person, remote, or hybrid)
- Support arrangements for the student
- Preferred start date and duration
- Contact details for further information
- Application and selection process

Host organisations are responsible for receiving, shortlisting and managing the application process as outlined in the pro forma. Once a candidate is selected, the host must confirm the decision with both the student and WGSSS Research in Practice Co-Ordinator.

Self organised placement

Alternatively, you may be approached directly by a WGSSS Researcher for a self-organised placement. This allows you to co-design a placement in collaboration with the Researcher to identify areas where their expertise, interests, and development goals align with your current priorities and activities to contribute to meaningful organisational outcomes.

A placement can begin only after:

- The student has submitted their placement approval application to WGSSS, which requires input and collaboration from both the Student's Supervisor and you, the Placement Host.
- Once WGSSS has issued placement approval, the Students home university will also request pre-placement information such as risk assessments / health and safety including supervisor permission and due diligence checks
- A signed agreement is in place between the host, student, and the student's university

You are welcome to advertise more than one placement opportunity, and we recommend placements are advertised for at least 4 weeks to attract sufficient interest.

What type of placements are suitable

Placements can take place from host organisations across academia, policy, business or civil society organisations and can be designed in collaboration with the student, or by your organisation with an outcome of your choice.

Specific activities could include:

- Working on a challenge together with industry stakeholders
- Informing policy makers on a particular topic
- Contributing to the development of a programme or service
- Disseminating research finding and testing research ideas
- Providing research support: Conducting literature reviews, surveys and interviews
- Analysing datasets and provide feedback to the organisation on findings
- Developing and contributing to workshops, seminars and training for stakeholders
- Knowledge exchange; Identifying new opportunities and building relationships with existing clients and stakeholders

Placement requirements:

As per the ESRC placement guidelines, the placement must:

- Focus on a discreet project, challenge or research question which will enable the students to build on their skills being acquired through their doctoral studies
- Clearly defines the expected outputs/deliverables
- Does not service as a substitute for temporary staffing or cover routine business as usual tasks
- Is clear in terms of format (full-time/part time and location)
- Includes details of the support the student will receive during the placement, including access to work equipping and contribution to any associated cost occurred as a result of the placements (i.e. travel and subsistence)
- Placements are to last 3 months full time (13 weeks) or part time equivalent (e.g 6 months, 26 weeks part time) and can include in-person, remote and hybrid opportunities
- For academic placement, students must be placed outside of their home department and not with their current supervisor or research team, to allow the students to apply research skills in different environments.
- For collaborative studentships, the placements can be with the collaborative partnership, but the placement would need to be a distinct project, separate from their PhD
- As this is a core component of the student's doctoral programme, they will be required to complete an end of placement report which will is mandatory.

What we expect from Placement Hosts:

- If undertaken in-person, provide access to adequate working space and equipment needed to undertake the placement
- Have experienced staff members on hand to help develop skills/act as a mentor
- Ensure students are embedded within a team and included in all meetings, events and training opportunities that are available (where appropriate)
- Ensure that the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are applied throughout the recruitment process and to the support available for students during their placements
- For any expenses incurred during the course of the placement i.e. travelling to business meetings or placement events, to be paid for by the placement host
- Students must not receive a salary during their placement as they will continue to be registered as a student and will continue to receive their stipend for the duration of the placement, which is part of their doctoral training.
- Complete an end of placement feedback form
- Maintain open communication with the WGSSS Research in Practice co-ordinator if issues arise, or there is a period of medical leave or absence.
- Assist with any required risk assessment and documentation to demonstrate organisational responsibility for health and safety for the student during the placement with the student's home university.

Key benefits to host organisations:

Minimal (or no) cost to your organisation: The researcher continues to be registered as a student and will continue to receive their stipend through their PhD studentship.

- Fresh perspectives and research-informed insights: Placements help bridge practice with the latest academic thinking.
- Access to academic networks: Build connections with researchers, universities, and research centres.
- Staff development opportunities: Offers your team experience in supervising and collaborating with early-career researchers.
- Enhanced visibility and recruitment potential: Raise awareness of your organisation among doctoral candidates and future graduates.
- Strategic partnerships: Strengthen relationships with the Welsh Graduate School for the Social Sciences (WGSSS), its partner universities, and academic staff.

Tips for a Successful Placement

Drawing on feedback from previous placement hosts, the following approaches can help maximise the value of the placement for both your organisation and the researcher.

Start with Clear Objectives
The most successful placements begin with a well-defined project and a clear understanding of the outcomes you hope to achieve. Establishing the project scope, outputs, and timetable at the outset helps ensure everyone has shared expectations and can make the best use of the placement period.

Be Flexible and Collaborative
While clear objectives are important, organisations should also be open to adapting the project as it develops. Doctoral researchers bring specialist expertise and valuable insights that may shape the direction of the work. Allowing space for collaboration and innovation can lead to stronger outcomes.

Hit the Ground Running
Placements are often completed within a relatively short timeframe. Early planning is essential to ensure momentum is established quickly. Agreeing project priorities, milestones, and key activities during the first few weeks can significantly improve the chances of successful delivery.

Build in Time for Challenges
Activities such as ethics reviews, participant recruitment, stakeholder engagement, or securing access to data can take longer than expected. Factoring these considerations into project planning can help avoid delays later in the placement.

Integrate the Researcher into the Wider Team

Researchers gain the most from placements when they feel part of the organisation rather than working in isolation. Including them in team meetings, organisational activities, and informal discussions helps them better understand your organisation and often leads to richer project outcomes.

Check In Regularly
Regular, light-touch communication works particularly well for placements that are part-time, hybrid, or remote. Weekly meetings provide an opportunity to monitor progress, offer guidance, identify barriers, and maintain momentum throughout the placement.

Create Opportunities to Share Their Work
Where possible, provide opportunities for researchers to present or disseminate their findings. Internal presentations, stakeholder events, workshops, and conference contributions can be highly valuable experiences that enhance both project impact and researcher development.

Contact and further information

Website: https://wgsss.ac.uk/research-in-practice-placement-hosts/
Submit your Expression of interest
Contact: Sian Shepherd - Research in Practice Co-ordinator – esrcrip@bangor.ac.uk