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| **Project:**  |
| **Title: PhD student placement opportunity –** *“Improved understanding of microplastics and identifying opportunities for further research”* |
| The Marine & Fisheries Division in the Welsh Government is seeking a PhD student for a placement opportunity within its Marine Biodiversity and Conservation team. The teams remit falls under the portfolio of the Minister for Climate Change and supports objectives under the Environment Act and Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The team covers a range of policy areas, such as marine biodiversity, Marine Protected Areas (MPA) and marine litter. The team works closely with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders and representatives of the UK Government and the other Devolved Administrations. The marine environment in Wales is diverse but also under threat from various pressures, such as marine litter. The marine conservation and biodiversity team are responsible for developing policy to ensure our most important species and habitats have a suitable level of protection whilst ensuring our marine environment can be shared with other users. The team’s key deliverables are; delivering the UK Marine Strategy, completing the MPA network, developing marine litter policy. The marine environment is typically the destination for most forms of litter and the team work closely with several other divisions in Welsh Government to support measures to tackle at source. **Background**Marine litter is a global concern, affecting all the oceans of the world. Every year, millions of tonnes of litter end up in the ocean worldwide, posing environmental, economic, health and aesthetic problems. In Wales, the problem is becoming more visible in the marine environment. This poses a risk to the condition of our marine biodiversity and tourism, for which the Welsh economy is reliant on. It is broadly assumed approximately 80% of marine litter (by quantity) is sourced from the terrestrial environment. A lot of work has been conducted already in Wales to address marine litter at source either through legislation or other measures. Microplastics is not unknown in the marine environment but it is becoming increasingly prevalent. Microplastics, unlike other litter items generally consist of small fragments of litter originating from a plethora of litter items. Therefore identifying the source can be difficult. It is understood microplastics have not only been found in the marine environment, but also in our inland waters and soil. At a policy level, some commitments have been made to establish a common methodology to analyse and assess microplastics found in marine sediment, through the UK Marine Strategy and OSPAR. An improved understanding will enhance our ability to apply measures to address microplastics. However, the differing environments in Wales may require different policies to address the issue. **Purpose of the post** Recently, a cross departmental working group has been established focusing on microplastics, recognising it is a varying issue in a number of different policy areas, such as marine, rivers/waters, soil, litter and public health. However, it is unclear the extent of research on microplastics which has been conducted across the UK and beyond. In order to develop policy the post-holder would be expected to conduct a comprehensive literature review of microplastics. The role will involve working with variety of different policy teams across Welsh Government to ascertain individual evidence needs and gaps. The post-holder will also be expected to work closely within relevant academia groups to further support the literature review. **Key Tasks**The post holder will work within the Marine Biodiversity and Conservation Branch but will be expected to work collaboratively with other teamsThe post holder will: * Conduct a comprehensive literature review on microplastics
* Identify any knowledge gaps and opportunities to improve these
* Identify key areas of interest which could support policy development leading to mitigation measures
* Brief government ministers on research findings

**Key Tasks** * Engagement with internal and external stakeholders
* Analysis of literature review identifying knowledge gaps and opportunities
* Drafting of briefing papers for senior officials and the Minister
* Development of policy recommendations
* Development of longer-term policy and strategic direction

The exact tasks required of the student will be dependent on the particular focus of the team at the time of the placement and the student will likely have the opportunity to become involved in other work areas where they have a specific interest |
| **Details**  |
| **Skills required:** | **Key Skills*** Excellent research skills
* Ability to analyse complex information and data
* Ability to write clearly and concisely
* Ability of presenting technical material in an accessible format
* Presentation skills
* Creative thinking
* Ability to apply an innovative approach
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| **Outputs:** | As agreed with line manager and in relation to the above priorities |
| **Host Organisation:**  | Welsh Government |
| **Placement Start Date** | Early 2022 |
| **Development Opportunities** | The placement provides an opportunity to gain insight into the functioning of Welsh government and evidenced based policy development at the highest level. The post-holder will work in an interesting and diverse team, contributing to the shaping of a future policy direction. The post-holder will be expected to work independently within parameters and guidelines provided by the Welsh Government. Working closely with a wide range of colleagues the successful candidate will build valuable working relationships, broaden their knowledge of public policy-making and enhance their existing transferable skills.The student will join a policy team managing a diverse range of programmes and providing technical and advisory support across the Environment portfolio. This is an interesting and diverse role, that links to other Welsh Government teams, which will allow the student to gain a broad knowledge and understanding of Government policy work. With support from their WG supervisor, the student will be expected to take responsibility for managing and delivery of work commitments during the placement period. |
| **Duration, location, working arrangements and environment:**  | The role will be full-time and is normally based with the policy team in one of Welsh Government’s regional offices. In view of current Covid-19 restrictions, the post-holder will be required to work from home in-line with working arrangements for all Welsh Government employees and it is unlikely that this will change for the foreseeable future. Post-holders will be provided with a laptop to facilitate regular contact with the policy team members and line management, other policy teams and external partners. Due to the remote nature of working, the policy team will ensure that the post-holder is fully supported during the placement and will endeavour to ensure that the placement is as close to the in-team office-based experience as possible.The placement will be for a 3 month period and will focus on delivering the objectives set out in the job specification. The option to extend for a further 3 months is possible if the project team feel there is merit in doing so and if it is compatible with the post-holder’s university research schedule and DTP/CDT arrangements. The Welsh Government is a bilingual organisation and Welsh language skills are considered an asset to the organisation. We encourage and support staff to use their Welsh language skills during a placement. Start date will be agreed following successful Welsh Government security clearance. |
| **Application criteria** | **Welsh Government can only accept applications to the PhD student placement programme from registered students**.**All applicants must seek approval from their academic supervisor before applying** |
| **Funding** |
| The placement will be funded by Welsh Government and will match the current UKRI PhD stipend rate, payable in one sum at the beginning of the placement (to minimise financial administration). The payment process aims to compliment PhD student university stipend payment structures, i.e. WG pay the university and the funds are passed-on to the student’s account. **Please note:  we do not pay students directly** |
| **Contact**  |
| **Name:**  | Caroline Fallone (Research & Academic Engagement Manager) via ResearchPlacements@gov.wales |
| **Application process**  |
| Please submit CV and covering letter to Caroline Fallone. **NOTE: All applicants must confirm that they have received authorisation to take an interruption of studies from their academic supervisor** If you have an impairment or health condition, or use British Sign Language and need to discuss reasonable adjustments for any part of the placement programme, or wish to discuss how we will support you if you are to be successful, please contact ResearchPlacements@gov.wales as soon as possible to discuss your requirements and any questions you may have. |