



Doctoral Training Policy and Evidence Placement

Project:

Title: PhD student placement opportunity – “Agricultural wages and employment evidence base”

The Agriculture – Sustainable Development Division of the Welsh Government is seeking a PhD student for a placement opportunity within its Agricultural Legislation Development team. The team’s remit falls under the portfolio of the Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd which supports delivery objectives identified under primary legislation such as the Agriculture Sector (Wales) Act 2014 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The team works closely with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders and representatives of the UK Government and the other Devolved Administrations.

Background

The [Agriculture Sector \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) aims to support a ‘resilient, sustainable and well-trained agricultural sector in Wales’, and in particular, regulates agricultural minimum wage rates and conditions, contributing to a more prosperous and innovative economy. Agriculture in this context includes agricultural, horticultural and forestry sectors.

In March 2022, the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector in Wales employed 1.8% of the national workforce. This is a greater proportion than in England (0.8%) and Scotland (1.6%), but lower than Northern Ireland (3%). Agricultural sector work has some distinctive characteristics frequently involving activities of a physical nature, many roles with low hourly wages, potential periods of long working hours, health and safety considerations and with a significant amount of family labour, non-permanent employees and self-employed contractors.

The independent [Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales](#) (the Panel) provides advice to the Welsh Ministers on the minimum rates of pay and other minimum terms and conditions of employment for agricultural workers in Wales. The Panel is made up of representatives of employers and employees, as well as three independent members (including the Chairperson) appointed by Welsh Ministers.

Each year the Panel proposes minimum rates of pay and terms and conditions for agricultural workers in Wales for the upcoming financial year, informed by their industry expertise and knowledge of conditions in the industry at the time, and subject to the prevailing baseline UK minimum wage requirements. Pay rate recommendations are provided for each of the relevant grades/types of agricultural workers. The Panel consult on their proposals before submitting to Welsh Ministers for approval. Once approved the changes take legal effect in Wales. The latest minimum rates are set out in the [Agricultural Wages \(Wales\) Order 2023](#).

Historically, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) collected agricultural wages data and produced statistical information, including operation of a costings model to support the work of the former Agricultural Wages Board. Their costings model made use of data sources providing information on worker numbers by grade, hours and wages information. The source of the worker grade information, the survey of Earnings and Hours of Agricultural Workers (E&H survey), was discontinued in 2010 and the costings model ceased in 2012, with no replacement source of grade-based data routinely collected.

The general costings model was not complicated but relied on the regular availability of suitable data. Discontinuation of the E&H survey and the time since its last collection, has contributed to a critical gap in the required data which is needed to inform Wales-specific modelling, with this dataset having been the primary data source providing a breakdown by grade of agricultural workers. Whilst the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) provides some information on wages and hours relating to relevant agricultural occupations, these do not provide an automatic match across to the grades provided for in Agricultural Wages Orders.

As part of bringing forward the annual legislation to enable changes to agricultural minimum wages and conditions to be implemented, a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is required to be produced to provide an estimate of the impacts of changes to agricultural minimum wages applying across the grade bands. To this point such estimates have relied on the above-mentioned historic information, but this has raised some important quality concerns given that this source is increasingly dated (and hence may not adequately reflect current employment structures) and is not Wales specific. The RIA accompanying the Agricultural Wages (No.2) (Wales) Order 2022 can be found at <https://senedd.wales/media/xdfyhi0/sub-ld15257-em-e.pdf>.

Existing Welsh Government and UK wide surveys and datasets do not provide the specific information relating to farm workers, hours and wages by farm worker grades and types, as they were designed for very different and specific purposes and/or generally structured to provide economy-wide consistency. Furthermore, attempts to conduct targeted surveys of agricultural employers and employees in Wales in the past to collect this information has failed to achieve the response rate required for statistical analysis.

It is challenging to collect accurate and reliable information on agricultural workers employment characteristics and pay rates due to well-known factors such as the dispersed nature of agricultural employment as well as potential concerns from some employers and employees regarding the supply of such employment and wage information to government departments (even under strict confidentiality and use conditions). In addition, the Welsh Government does not hold a record of individual farm workers, and so has no means of engaging directly with them.

An article published by ONS '[Labour in the Agriculture Industry, UK Feb 2018](#)' provides an overview of the issues and relative merits of various available agricultural labour statistical data sources. It identifies the potential to add additional questions to existing surveys to capture specific gaps in knowledge, making better use of existing data sources, and highlights explanatory potential of the Pay as You Earn Real Time Information data.

Since 2020, funding has been granted to develop a new facility to link together de-identified agricultural data with other administrative datasets. The AD|ARC (Administrative Data | Agricultural Research Collection) project, led by a team within ADR Wales, plans to bring together public sector data on agricultural and land use activities with demographic, educational and health data to better understand the people who work in the sector in the UK and their defining characteristics.

Purpose of the Post

The purpose of the post is to explore, and potentially develop, options to improve the data and evidence base available to the Panel and policy team, and specifically to investigate potential effective means of collecting appropriate and useable statistical data to support more robust estimates within the Regulatory Impact Assessments supporting future Agricultural Wages Orders. The work will be split into three phases.

Phase 1

Work with the Policy Team, Welsh Government Statisticians (including the AD | ARC team based in Welsh Government) and Economists and the Panel to develop a thorough understanding of the problem and data/evidence requirements.

Review the existing agricultural labour and wages data and information that could be used by the Panel and Welsh Government to practical effect to inform their agricultural wages order decisions in the short term, drawing this together into a user-friendly evidence pack suitable for a lay person, noting quality constraints and limitations. This should consider both official and other sources of potentially relevant information. This evidence pack could then be compared and contrasted to the current suite of data sources being developed under the AD | ARC project.

Explore and assess why previous agricultural worker and wages data collections have been unsuccessful and identify barriers that need to be overcome. Approaches used elsewhere to obtaining such information where this takes place should also be investigated. The findings of Phase 1 will be crucial to the progress of Phases 2 and 3. If Phase 1 concludes that previous identified barriers to collecting data needs are insurmountable, then this outcome would be considered a valid conclusion to the study. It is possible that Phase 1 may form an initial 3 month placement period, with Phases 2 and 3 if viable being undertaken during a placement extension.

Phase 2

Through working with Welsh Government policy officials and statisticians (including the AD | ARC team), identify potential current or future innovative solutions to address the current gaps in required statistical data and provide consideration of the likely feasibility, costs, benefits and risks of each option. This should include careful

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assessment of relevant statistical and data issues such as survey response rates, data usability, statistical representativeness, quality considerations, and scope for annual repeatability etc. Such potential solutions could involve influencing existing or developing data collection projects, for example, the AD I ARC, to better adapt where possible to meeting the Panel's needs.

The work should investigate each of the relevant elements of data needed to estimate annual Agricultural Wages Order pay effects, with the assessment critically investigating the scope and potential to progress representative data collection on each element, including the number of agricultural workers by grade/type and broad working pattern, hours worked (basic and overtime), and (if possible) hourly wages (for which particular challenges may be applicable), and information on other relevant characteristics relating to Order payments determinations (see link to RIA above for current pay calculations and data requirements) .

In discussion with the Welsh Government, draw out where progress might be feasibly made and over what timescales, and seek to identify a workable preferred option for piloting.

Phase 3

Develop the approach to pilot the preferred option, setting out the methodology and technical issues and how they will be addressed. Implementation of any pilot will depend on obtaining approval from the Welsh Government taking account of the nature of the proposals, costs, likely time requirements, and other relevant factors. Subject to approval and time availability, the work could involve initial piloting and recommending improvements for future iterations, where required.

The project will require working in collaboration with Welsh Government officials, the Panel and the production of user-friendly updates and reports.

Key Tasks

- Engage with and build effective working relationships with a range of internal and external stakeholders, including Panel member, Welsh Government statisticians and policy officials.
- Review relevant information and data sources, prepare a synthesis of key findings and identify evidence gaps.
- Analyse previous attempts at overcoming the statistical challenges, including identification and the consideration of the barriers encountered and an assessment of the feasibility to overcome each.
- Provide constructive challenge where appropriate, including for example the data need assumptions of the Panel and the Welsh Government. Alternative data types, as well as alternative sources, to meet the policy aims should be considered.
- Identify innovative solutions to data/evidence collection, over a range of timescales if appropriate.
- Draft reports for the Panel, Welsh Government and Ministers as required.
- Develop and pilot the preferred approach.

NasdDetails

Skills required:	<p><u>Key Skills</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent data and research skills • Ability to analyse complex information and data • Ability to write clearly and concisely • Ability of presenting technical material in an accessible format • Ability to see the big picture as well as a focus on the detail • Presentation skills • Creative thinking • Ability to apply an innovative approach
Outputs:	As agreed with line manager and in relation to the above priorities

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Host Organisation:	Welsh Government
Placement Start Date	July/August
Development Opportunities	<p>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.</p> <p>The student will join a policy team managing a diverse range of programmes and providing technical and advisory support. This is an interesting and diverse role and links to other Welsh Government teams 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.</p>
Duration, location, working arrangements and environment:	<p>The role will be full-time and is normally based with the policy team in one of Welsh Government's regional offices, with close support from Welsh Government statistical colleagues. In view of current Covid-19 restrictions, the post-holder will be required to work from home, with opportunities for regular face to face meetings, in-line with working arrangements for all Welsh Government employees and it is unlikely that this will change for the foreseeable future.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Start date will be agreed following successful Welsh Government security clearance.</p>
Application criteria	<p>Welsh Government can only accept applications to the PhD student placement programme from registered students.</p> <p>All applicants must seek approval from their academic supervisor before applying.</p>
Funding	
<p>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.</p>	
Contact	



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Name:

Simon Baldwin (Research & Academic Engagement Manager) via
ResearchPlacements@gov.wales

Application process

Please submit CV and covering letter to Simon Baldwin. **NOTE: All applicants must confirm that they have received authorisation to take an interruption of studies from their academic supervisor and/or DTP/CDT Manager**

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.