

Project: Development of Soil policy statement for Wales – Soil Scientist

Title: PhD student placement opportunity – *Soil monitoring opportunities for Wales*

The Welsh Government (WG) Peatland Restoration and Land Use Planning Unit is seeking a PhD student for a placement opportunity. The Team is responsible for Best and Most Versatile (BMV)¹ land protection policy, mineral & waste reclamation to agriculture and peatland restoration.

The Team are responsible for the Soil Policy Evidence Programme and work in collaboration with Natural Resources Wales (NRW), through the WG/NRW Technical Soils Group, to expand the evidence base for Wales and ensure an evidence-based approach to managing Welsh soils. The Team also has responsibility for the National Peatland Restoration Plan, a £5.5 million/year budget for capital works to restore over 600ha of peatland a year for the next five years.

The Team's remit falls under the portfolio of the Minister's for Climate Change and Rural Affairs which supports delivery objectives identified under primary legislation such as the Environment Act and 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.

The Team has commissioned over 40 research reports to better understand climatic and soil conditions in Wales, and the associated challenges. Reports from the Soil Policy Evidence Programme (SPEP) can be found here: [Soils policy evidence programme | GOV.WALES](#)

In 2022, the team began developing an Agricultural Soil Statement for Wales (ASPS). Initially, a seconded Research Fellow, supported by two PhD placements produced a synthesis of Welsh relevant soils evidence. The synthesis is published and can be found here: <https://gov.wales/review-welsh-soil-evidence>. Alongside evidence gathered through stakeholder engagement, this synthesis was the foundation for the ASPS, which will be published later this year and represents the Welsh Government's aim and objectives for sustainable management of agricultural soil in Wales.

The ASPS identified three main objectives through the engagement work and evidence review:

- Increase information of Welsh soils.
- Encourage sharing of information on soils; and
- Protect, maintain and enhance soils, soil functions and services.

Increasing information on soils involves promoting monitoring of soil, at local and national scales to enhance understanding of trends, threats, and opportunities for achieving resilient soils. Existing data has provided an important national snapshot of the current state of soils in Wales (e.g. stable trend in soil organic matter content on improved land). Collecting more detailed, long-term information on Welsh soils would help to track trends, target interventions, assess the effectiveness of policies and practices for protecting soils, and shape future approaches. Filling the gaps in knowledge and evidence will also be important in light of the new challenges soils may face from climate change.

We would like a soil scientist PhD placement to help us understand what effective soil monitoring would look like through a review of existing monitoring approaches in Wales and in the rest of the UK. This would include priorities for monitoring, scale – local or national – applicability to the Welsh context and any gaps in measures.

Purpose of the Post

The post holder will undertake a review of existing soil monitoring approaches to identify appropriate measures for a Welsh context that could enhance our current understanding. This will build on the objectives of the ASPS to help us understand how we could operationalise increasing information on Welsh soils. The post holder will

¹ [Planning Policy Wales - Edition 12 \(gov.wales\)](#) (paragraphs 3.58 and 3.59)

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be supported by the Soils Policy and Land Use Team to review the existing evidence and produce a report of their findings, including any recommendations.

The post holder will be encouraged to develop their own ideas for the soil policy statement, supported by the WG Soil Policy Team.

The intention is to host a placement for a 3-month period, although longer placements of up to six months would be considered.

Key Tasks

- Review existing soil monitoring approaches
- Where relevant liaise with other policy teams in WG, UK Government and devolved nations
- Produce report and recommendations
- Development of longer-term policy direction

The post holder could become involved in other work areas where they have a specific interest.

Details

Skills required:	<p><u>Key Skills</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent research skills • Ability to analyse complex information and data • Ability to write clearly and concisely • Good presentation skills • Ability to apply an innovative approach • Creative thinking • Ability to present technical material in an accessible format
Outputs:	As agreed with line manager and in relation to the above priorities, will broadly include a report and presentation of findings/workshop.
Host Organisation:	Welsh Government
Placement Start Date	October 2024
Development Opportunities	<p>The placement provides an opportunity to gain insight into the functioning of Welsh Government and evidence-based policy development at the highest level. The post-holder will work in an interesting and diverse team, contributing to the shaping of 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 soil policy team managing a diverse evidence-base and delivering technical and advisory support. This is an interesting and diverse role, working on a high-profile programme across Welsh Government portfolios which will allow the student to gain a broad knowledge and understanding of Welsh 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	Welsh Government supports ‘Smart Working’; working remotely while also enabling people to come together in an office environment to connect and collaborate where that is beneficial. The successful candidate will be expected to work remotely with periodic attendance at meetings in Welsh Government Offices when relevant and required.

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<p>and environment:</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>
<p>Application criteria</p>	<p>Welsh Government can only accept applications to the PhD student placement programme from registered students living in the UK.</p> <p>All applicants must seek approval from their academic supervisor before applying.</p>
<p>Funding</p>	
<p>The placement will be funded by Welsh Government and will match the current minimum 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. To avoid delays to students receiving payments, it is preferable that the student's PhD stipend is not paused during the placement and that, instead, it continues and that WG reimburse the university for the time the student is not undertaking research.</p> <p>Please note: We do not pay students directly</p>	
<p>Contact</p>	
<p>Name:</p>	<p>Contact Stephany Aymerich (Research & Academic Engagement Manager) via researchplacements@gov.wales</p>
<p>Application process</p>	
<p>Please submit CV and covering letter to Stephany Aymerich. NOTE: All applicants must confirm that they have received authorisation to take an interruption of studies from their academic supervisor</p> <p>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 the Research & Innovation team (researchplacements@gov.wales) as soon as possible to discuss your requirements and any questions you may have.</p>	