# Using the Understanding Society study to explore societal changes during the Covid-19 pandemic

# Summary

This is an exciting opportunity to undertake a paid work placement on a research project for the Welsh Government. The project will explore the Understanding Society data sets and how they can be used to answer key policy questions relating to changes to the nature of inequality and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic. The successful applicant will work closely with Welsh Government analysts and policy officials to research and develop a varied range of research outputs, and support the Welsh Government in their research process. The applicant will have the opportunity to apply research skills in a government environment, further develop generic skills (such as report writing for policy makers or making presentations), and to enhance their knowledge of research outside academia.

# The Organisation

The Welsh Government is the devolved Government for Wales with responsibility for the economy, education, health and the Welsh NHS, business, public services and the environment of Wales.

Specifically, the internship will be based within Knowledge and Analytic services (KAS). KAS provides the collection, analysis and presentation of research and data for policymakers and the general public in keeping with professional standards. They offer independent evidence to understand, develop, implement, monitor and evaluate government policies. KAS also supports policy colleagues with policy development, implementation and delivery.

Welsh Government supports staff from diverse backgrounds. Welsh Government offers a range of network groups to support individuals with various protected characteristics should employees wish. The network groups include, but are not limited to, a BAME group, an LGBT+ group and a disability group. Welsh Government has a dedicated team who will help discuss workplace adjustments with employees who may require additional support or adjustments to enable them to maximum their capabilities.

The organisation has a flexible hours working policy and employees are encouraged to take 1 hour a week from office hours to do an activity that will benefit their well-being (pro-rata for part-time workers).

# The Internship

The intern will be part of the Social Justice Research team who provide analytical support to the Communities and Tacking Poverty policy area. The internship will provide an exciting opportunity to work at the heart of Welsh Government. The internship will require working closely with policy officials and researchers, and will provide an opportunity to apply research skills in a policy environment, further develop generic skills (such as report writing or making presentations), and to enhance policy knowledge.

The intern will be line managed by a member of the Government Social Research profession. They will benefit from development opportunities offered centrally by the Welsh Government, potentially including mentoring, shadowing, peer support and training.

Interns will benefit from the experience of working closely with the Welsh Government:

* Gaining a better understanding of the world outside of academia and increasing employability, using their knowledge and skills to contribute to the work of the Welsh Government
* The intern’s colleagues at the Welsh Government can offer an insight into the intern’s PhD project that can contribute to the success of their thesis’, as well as networking opportunities within the policy arena linked to their research area
* Transferable ‘soft’ skills such as project planning and working with a large team
* Time management skills
* Report writing skills, particular in tailoring messages for varied audiences
* Translating technical findings into usable policy relevant writing

# The Project

Understanding Society is the largest longitudinal study of its kind and provides crucial information for researchers and policymakers on the changes and stability of people's lives in the UK. For example, the survey is used by the Department for Work and Pensions to produce [estimates on persistent low](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/income-dynamics-2010-to-2018) income.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, from April 2020, participants from the main [Understanding Society sample completed an additional short web-survey](https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/topic/covid-19). This survey covered the changing impact of the pandemic on the welfare of UK individuals, families and wider communities. The survey has been sent out to participants monthly. The survey contains rotating content on topics such as: coronavirus illness, mental wellbeing, finances, relationships, health behaviours and working life. The Covid-19 survey is linkable to the main Understanding Society survey and can therefore provide a rich picture of societal changes.

The Welsh Government has [previously identified](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/140409-potential-analysis-british-household-panel-survey-en.pdf) that Understanding Society holds potential for analysis into key policy questions. In particular, prior research suggested that Understanding Society would be suitable for analysis around transitions in individuals and households lives. Currently, research in Wales using Understanding Society data has considered [poverty dynamics](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/140409-potential-analysis-british-household-panel-survey-en.pdf) and the relationship between voting and volunteering for young people.

The project will use Understanding Society data to provide a greater understanding of some of the drivers and impacts of both inequality and wellbeing in Wales. The recent pandemic has bought many existing inequalities to the fore. The longitudinal nature of the Understanding Society dataset offers a unique resource with which to track these changes over the time. The internship will focus broadly on changes to wellbeing, inequality and poverty with a focus on groups with protected characteristics such as: those with disabilities, young people and black and ethnic minority individuals. Within this broad topic area the intern will have the opportunity to shape the exact focus on the work according to their own particular interests.

Anticipated project outcomes:

* A short series of topic specific ‘Insight Reports’ into key policy questions:
  + The impact of the pandemic on vulnerable children’s schooling
  + The impact of the pandemic on the nature of poverty in Wales
    - The impact of the pandemic of food poverty
  + Changes in incomes sources following the pandemic in Wales
  + Changes to mental well-being and loneliness for vulnerable groups in Wales
  + Any other topics the student identifies
* A short technical report which would include the following:
  + A review of what the data can tell us
  + A discussion of the different types of analysis which could be used on the survey data and recommendations on the best approach to use
* Annotated syntax for carrying out the analysis, including any data preparation work (e.g. recoding of variables)
* A presentation to analytical colleagues and policy officials
* A training session with appropriate teams to share findings and to demonstrate how to replicate the work in future

# Internship responsibilities and requirements

The internship will last for three months, with the option of extension, during which time the students PhD project will be paused by their home institution. The student will be paid the equivalent of their stipend during their internship. Over and above leave policies, time for existing PhD commitments can be arranged on discussion with line managers. E.g. research groups meetings and conference presentations. Applications are encouraged from part-time students.

It is anticipated that the successful applicant will be working from home during their internship. This is based on our current understanding of the situation and what is possible in terms of research work. This may change as the Covid-19 situation develops. Should the Covid-19 situation develop and allow for a return for a phased return to offices this will be discussed with successful applicants.

The internship will last for a period of three months full-time or the part-time equivalent. For students registered on a part-time studentship, this internship is available on a part-time basis over a longer time frame (no fewer than three days a working week), this would be negotiated between the WG 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.

Student specification

## The student must have:

* Experience working with survey data
* Strong data analysis skills including:
  + Experience in handling/manipulating data, using statistical software
  + The ability to produce cross-tabulations and undertake multilevel modelling
* The ability to produce well designed charts
* The ability to produce concise, well written documents presenting technical material in an accessible format.

Given the relatively broad focus to the project interns are not expected to have strong knowledge across all of the topics covered by the work. The internship will include time for the student to familiarise themselves with appropriate literatures. Whilst applicants do not need to be familiar with Understanding Society to apply for this opportunity, knowledge of analysis techniques for large surveys would be an advantage. The intern will be given support to develop their knowledge of the policy area the internship focuses on. Any queries on this can be directed to [Hannah.brownegott@gov.wales](mailto:Hannah.brownegott@gov.wales).

# Funding and costs

Reasonable travel and accommodation costs for students not normally based in Cardiff can be met. Requests should be consistent with Wales DTP guidelines. Applications from students requiring additional funding for travel and accommodation will not be treated less favourably. For any queries on this please contact Carole Baker at the Wales DTP on: [enquiries@walesdtp.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@walesdtp.ac.uk)

# Start date of internship

January 2021 (exact date to be negotiated). There may be some flexibility dependent on individual circumstances.

# Security

The Welsh Government’s vetting procedures (which apply to temporary as well as permanent staff) involve the completion of a Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) application form and a Security Questionnaire for the purpose of security vetting.

This process requires the applicant to produce in person three original forms of identification documents, one of which should be photographic (passport, new driving license), one document should showing their current address, plus one of: a utility bill, birth certificate, P45 or P60.

# Queries

Any queries relating to the post or application process should be directed to:

Hannah Browne Gott

Hannah.brownegott@gov.wales