

PaCCS Placement with Opal
The National Intelligence Unit for Serious Organised Acquisitive Crime

LOCATION: *Remote Working (from researcher's home)*

REFERENCE: PaCCS OPAL Placement (2021).

CLOSING DATE: 11 June 2021

COMPENSATION: *A Student Maintenance Grant of £3,875.85 is provided to cover 3 months.*

Claims for eligible travel & accommodation costs incurred during the placement up to a limit of £2,400

UKRI's Partnership for Conflict, Crime & Security Research (PaCCS) is seeking a researcher to undertake a placement, spending three months working with Opal – the National Intelligence Unit for Serious Organised Acquisitive Crime. Opal has an interest in the criminal disposal routes and markets for catalytic converters, with a focus on processes associated with extraction of precious metals¹. **This placement is part of the PaCCS programme *Transnational Organised Crime (TNOC): Deepening & Broadening Our Understanding*.**

The successful candidate will work with material classified up to OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE as well as Open Source data. The researcher will need to be security-cleared to MV (Management Vetting) level, allowing appropriate access to Opal's data, personnel and (when required) office. An Opal point-of-contact will provide support and in-house supervision. The Placement is expected to spend a significant amount of time working remotely; there will be a need for some travel within the UK. The successful candidate will report to Dr Tristram Riley-Smith (Director of Research at Cambridge's Department of Politics & International Studies and PaCCS Research Integrator).

The placement will entail discussions with relevant stakeholders; reading documents, reviewing police data and interviewing experts in extraction processes (in order to understand the specialist trades and skills involved). Findings will need to be collated and analysed before drafting an OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE Assessment which can be easily understood by policy audiences. This report will be the key output of this placement and will be used by Opal to inform policy thinking. There may be scope for the researcher to present their findings to stakeholders through a presentation. We will look for opportunities to disseminate findings more widely and demonstrate the value of this placement to a wider audience (e.g. the PaCCS community), but this will require Opal approval.

¹ The increasing value of metals such as Platinum, Palladium and Rhodium is driving growth in the theft of catalytic converters. According to PND data, 28,849 offences were recorded during 2020 - an increase of 64% compared with 2019. Hybrid vehicles are targeted during most offences due to the high quality of the metals. The crimes are often committed in public car parks (including those at hospitals and supermarkets); but crimes in residential areas began to increase in late 2020, bringing an increased risk of confrontation and violence. The extraction of these precious metals requires a high degree of skill (suggesting an increased level of organisation): extraction requires specialist equipment with the disposal route having been commonly associated with scrap metal dealers. Opal are seeking to explore information they have received supporting the involvement of other trades with the relevant skills. There appears to be an international dimension, with evidence of stolen converters being exported.

Mandatory Competencies: the successful candidate will have strong academic grounding in either Arts, Humanities, Social or Behavioural Science and be continuing to conduct research in at least one of these areas. The candidate will have strong analytical skills, strong oral and written communication skills. The post is best-suited to those studying towards a PhD where the PaCCS funding (in the form of a Student Maintenance Grant) would allow – with the support of UKRI and the necessary approval of the researcher’s university – three months to be “taken out” to work on this placement. Those who are engaged in post-doctoral research are also eligible to apply.

Desirable Competencies: it would be very helpful if the successful candidate exhibits knowledge and understanding of issues surrounding TNOc in general and the organisations involved in acquisitive crime in particular. It is also desirable to be able to demonstrate evidence of team-working and a commitment to work across relevant disciplines. The candidate should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the link between research, policy and operations.

Fixed Term / Final Clearance: *The funds for this placement are available for 3 months between September and November 2021. The posting will be subject to final clearance from OPAL.*

To apply for this vacancy, please email tr356@cam.ac.uk by midnight on the Closing Date, providing a one-page cv and a covering letter describing:

- a. your current research (150 words);
- b. skills you can bring to this placement and your achievements to date of relevance to undertaking this work; *current security clearance is not required, but let us know if you happen to have this;* (200 words)
- c. what you hope to gain from this placement (150 words)?

Before any successful Placement commences, we will require the written approval of your University Supervisor and Research Office². At this early stage, please confirm they have been consulted and agree in principle to this application.

We value diversity and we are committed to equality of opportunity.

We have a responsibility to ensure that all employees are eligible to live and work in the UK.

² UKRI guidance stipulates that:

- research students may undertake a work placement or internship where this is either directly related to the student’s training, or provides valuable transferable skills and, provided this is well justified and approved in advance by their Supervisor and Research Organisation;
- the timescale of any existing studentship (linked to the person taking up the PaCCS Placement) will need to be extended to reflect the period of the Placement; funding for this three-month Placement is covered by the ESRC grant to Dr Riley-Smith as PaCCS Research Integrator – with arrangements for payment to be agreed with the student’s Research Office.

The Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research (PaCCS) is an initiative of UK Research & Innovation (UKRI). PaCCS aims to deliver high-quality and cutting-edge research to improve our understanding of current and future global security challenges (including Transnational Organised Crime). It convenes researchers from across academic disciplines to work on innovative projects, creating opportunities for knowledge exchange with stakeholders. See: www.paccsresearch.org.uk/.

Opal is a national intelligence unit focused on serious organised acquisitive crime (SOAC) where there is a series of offences impacting on two or more police force areas, including Scotland and Northern Ireland. It was established in 2019 and is based at West Mercia Police Headquarters. Its purpose is to discover and develop intelligence to support the disruption of organised crime groups that are a priority, due to their assessed levels of threat, economic/social impact and financial/material gain. This in turn will improve the UK's knowledge and response to cross border criminality in relation to SOAC. See: [OPAL - National Intelligence Unit for Serious Organised Acquisitive Crime \(npcc.police.uk\)](https://npcc.police.uk/).