

UKRI Policy Fellowships 2023: What Works Fellowship Opportunity Description

Fellowship Title: Youth Futures Foundation – Understanding What Makes for Quality Work Fellowship

Available budget: The full economic cost is £210,000 inclusive of additional £40,000 budget for research and collaboration costs, for further details on the additional budget see the 'How to apply' section specific to the What Works Innovation Fellowships. UKRI will fund 80% of the full economic cost of the grant.

What Works Host Organisation: [Youth Futures Foundation \(YFF\)](#)

Host Team: Impact and Evidence

Summary: Using a mixed methods approach to understand what makes for high quality jobs for young people, understanding the dispersion of quality work around the UK, and working to support firms and policymakers to increase the quality of work.

Fellowship Theme: Data and Evaluation. Please see the full call text 'What We Are Looking For' for a detailed summary of the research themes targeted in this call.

Policy Topic: Understanding and Increasing Quality Employment

Research Council: ESRC

Academic Discipline/s: Economics, Psychology, Sociology

Research Career Stage: All career stages

Fellowship Structure

Inception Phase:

Estimated Start Date: October 2023. Exact date to be confirmed by the host depending on onboarding and security clearance requirements.

Duration: 3 months

FTE: 0.4 FTE

Main Placement Phase:

Duration: 12 months

FTE: 0.6-1 FTE

Knowledge Exchange Phase:

Duration: 3 months

FTE: 0.4 FTE

Work Arrangements

Location Requirements: Based at one of Youth Futures' Offices in London, Leeds or Birmingham.

Hybrid Working: Youth Futures is a highly flexible organisation and arrangements for being in the office(s) will be discussed between the Fellow and their point of contact.

Security Clearance: We expect the Fellow to be subject to a basic Disclosure and Barring Service check, and for the fellowship to commence after this check, but there are no formal security requirements.

Fellowship Opportunity Description

This fellow will work with the Youth Futures Foundation on a project that will seek to tackle the policy challenge of understanding what makes for “high quality” employment (particularly for young people); how high-quality jobs can be created, and where they exist at the moment. The YFF’s work is focused on how to increase good quality employment for young people, but we also recognise that not all jobs are equal, creating a potential tension between being employed sooner, and potentially taking longer to find a higher quality job. This fellowship will help us to understand and navigate that tension. At the heart of this project is the assumption that work quality is about more than simply ‘being employed’, or even receiving a particular level of pay. Rather, it is about the wellbeing that the job produces in the person’s life, which may be different for different people (Tenaglia, 2022)¹.

The main research questions are interested in are:

- What are the components of “high quality” work for young people in England and how does that vary according to their characteristics and experiences and why?
- Where are high quality jobs located? For example, analysis could look at interactions between characteristics of high-quality work and the locations where they are clustered
- How much can policymakers and employers increase the quality of jobs for young people, with a particular focus on regions and local areas that are a priority for ‘levelling up’?

We anticipate that the fellowship will have several elements:

First, a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative research with young people in employment, hedonic survey experiments (a form of experiment in which one aspect of a complex good is varied for different participants, allowing for identification of the value placed on that aspect) (Edmonds, 1984²), and analysis of large-scale survey data including potentially the Living Costs and Food Survey, Millennium Cohort Study, or the Next Steps Study, to look at which factors, including pay, hours, flexible working, and stability, affect the wellbeing that people derive from a job, using both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses.

Second, we anticipate that the fellow will work with colleagues from WWCW and YFF to investigate where these jobs are located, both regionally and sectorally, around the country, using a mixture of primary data collection and analysis of data potentially including IDBR, and the Living Costs and Food Survey, Labour Force Survey microdata, the Business Register and Employment Survey, and emerging insights from Youth Futures’ own research. This analysis might include analysis of specific “Good Work” initiatives including that in Greater Manchester. This work will allow the creation of academic papers and more practical policy outputs such as an interactive map of high wellbeing jobs around the country, potentially including ‘good work’ initiatives established by local authorities.

Third, the fellow will work with a panel of employers and colleagues in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education to understand how more jobs that are “wellbeing-enhancing” are created, and how to increase ethnic minority young people’s access to them. This component of the work will involve working closely with YFF and WWCW to conduct critical analysis of the policy options available to make recommendations that are evidence based, concrete, and feasible.

We are flexible about the exact activities undertaken by the fellow over the course of the fellowship, including which specific methodologies will be used to answer the research questions of interest. However, we do anticipate that the methodology to be deployed will be primarily quantitative although we welcome alternative and mixed methods approaches. The exact approach will be codesigned by YFF and the fellow during the inception phase.

In terms of outputs, we expect that the work described above will generate one or more policy papers, which report the results of the research and its implications to an audience of policymakers and professionals. We also anticipate the fellow giving presentations both internally to the host organisations, and to partners including the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, employer groups, local and combined authorities, intermediate groups that support young people and government departments. In addition, we would hope that the research findings could form the basis for academic publication either as book chapters or peer reviewed papers.

The partners will make use of these findings and outputs to:

¹ Tenaglia, S (2022). Analysis of the wellbeing of different occupations and how this varies by time and participant characteristics. *What Works Centre for Wellbeing*

² Edmonds Jr, R. G. (1984). A theoretical basis for hedonic regression: A research primer. *Real Estate Economics*, 12(1), 72-85.

- Use metrics of job quality to inform outcome measures for randomised trials and other research projects
- Refine processes to maximise the likelihood that our own activities and funding leads to high quality jobs for young people
- Contribute to toolkits for employers on how to increase the wellbeing of their staff as well as creating high quality jobs
- Help employers to create good jobs for, and recruit and retain young employees from, marginalised groups

We anticipate substantial knowledge exchange as a part of this fellowship. The fellow will benefit from working with experienced teams at both host organisations, and will develop new skills and knowledge including:

- Exposure to people working at the frontline of trying to improve employment for young people
- Understanding the policy context and how it can be influenced
- Learning what grant funders are looking for when funding research
- Opportunities to build and contribute to networks in policy and practice

Person Specification

Applications will be assessed against the following opportunity-specific requirements in addition to the generic eligibility and call criteria.

Essential Criteria:

An academic track record in a discipline relevant to the fellowship and/or a research interest in a relevant domain, ideally including at least one of:

- Labour Economics, Wellbeing Economics, Social Psychology, Organisational behaviour, Behavioural Economics, Industrial Organisation, Sociology, Social Policy, Regional Development Policy
- Research interest in young people, employment, wellbeing and equality
- A background in econometrics and/or statistics
- Polished communication and public speaking skills and engagement with a range of stakeholders, for example employers, public sector, policy-makers, civil society sectors
- Experience working in a team environment
- Ability to critically assess different options and make recommendations for policy and practice
- Stakeholder engagement and collaboration, especially policy makers and employers
- Self-motivating with the ability to work in a team

Desirable Criteria:

- Experience analysing survey data including the Living Costs and Food Survey, Annual Population Survey, etc.
- Experience designing online or survey experiments
- Qualitative research skills including interviews and focus groups