

UKRI policy fellowships 2025: fellowship position

Fellowship title: Department for the Economy post-school Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy fellowship

Fellowship type: Core policy fellowship

Host organisation: [Northern Ireland Department for the Economy](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

Host team: based within the Longitudinal Education Outcomes for Northern Ireland (LEO NI) team in DfE's Analytical Services Division. Engagement with SEN policy team in DfE's Skills Division. The LEO NI team is made up of Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) statisticians, and the fellow will work alongside statisticians and economists with expertise in training, apprenticeships, higher level apprenticeships, further education and higher education statistics

Summary: opportunity to undertake research using the novel LEO NI dataset (which will link schools' data with training, apprenticeships, further and higher education data) to inform the development of post-school SEN policy in Northern Ireland

Policy topic: post-school SEN pathways and outcomes for young people in Northern Ireland. This aligns with one of the nine stated priorities for Northern Ireland government: Better Support for Children and Young People with SEN and with the UK Government's Opportunity Mission

Research Council: ESRC

Academic discipline(s): economics of education, applied econometrics, policy, data and evaluation, statistical research and methodology

Research career stage: open to early or mid-career researchers

Fellowship structure

Inception phase:

Estimated start date: February 2026. Exact date to be confirmed by the host depending on onboarding and security clearance requirements

Duration: three months

FTE: 0.4 FTE

Main placement phase:

Duration: 12 months

FTE: 0.6 to 1 FTE

Knowledge exchange phase:

Duration: three months

FTE: 0.4 FTE

Work arrangements

Location requirements: flexible and open to negotiation with the successful applicant. If the fellow is based in Northern Ireland, some presence at the DfE, Adelaide House, Adelaide Street, Belfast where both LEO NI team and SEN policy team are based, is preferred. If the fellow is based outside Northern Ireland, there would be a need to schedule regular in-person meetings, dependent on the nature of the final agreed upon work programme

Hybrid working: hybrid working available and office attendance arrangements to be agreed with successful applicant. If the successful applicant is based in Northern Ireland, a hybrid working model of at least two days per week in the office during the main placement phase is expected, with flexibility to meet business needs. If the fellow is based outside Northern Ireland, we anticipate that the fellowship could be undertaken effectively with remote working and

monthly visits to the DfE office (as appropriate) to attend meetings with colleagues. Some travel will be required for stakeholder engagement and knowledge exchange events. Eligible Travel and Subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details

Security clearance: Basic Personnel Security Standard checks (BPSS), expected to take four to six weeks from submission. We expect the successful applicant to start the security clearance application process, with support from the host team as soon as their fellowship has been confirmed. Ideally the security clearance process would be completed before the inception phase begins. It may be possible to begin the inception phase before the security clearance process is completed, if necessary, but security clearance will be required for the main placement phase. Access Northern Ireland check may also be required for Northern Ireland residents with two to three working days required. Security check arrangements will vary for candidates based in GB. Please see [National security vetting: clearance levels](#) for further information

Fellowship description

The fellow will plan and undertake research using the first phase of the novel LEO NI dataset aimed at generating insight and answering complex policy questions in relation to post-school SEN policy in Northern Ireland. The research is expected to include the provision of expert longitudinal analysis on the barriers faced by school leavers with SEN in Northern Ireland and the education pathways taken into training, further and higher education. The research is also expected to include the investigation of outcomes for school leavers with SEN and the measurement of the impact of current skills and education programmes.

The Programme for Government 2024 to 2027 ([‘Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most’](#)) outlines better support for children and young people with SEN as a key priority. Unlike England and Wales, there is currently no coordinated system or plan across government to provide for young people with SEN after they leave school. The research is expected to inform a comprehensive review of current post-school SEN skills and education provision and best practice to develop a policy framework. The research will also align with the UK Government’s Opportunity Mission particularly in terms of building skills for opportunity and growth. Statistics and research produced by the fellow will inform departmental decision-making, support effective policy development and future spending to improve the current education and skills provision, opportunities and outcomes for all.

During the inception phase of the fellowship, the fellow will have the opportunity to codesign the scope of the work, define research tasks and deliverables in collaboration with DfE’s SEN policy team based on key policy priorities and the expertise and interests of the fellow. Regular meetings will be set up to enable the academic evidence and expertise to be accessible to the SEN policy team.

As an Accredited Researcher, the fellow will access the LEO NI datasets via the ONS Secure Research Service. The fellow will also have the opportunity to make use of ESRC-funded longitudinal data sources such as Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources ([CLOSER](#))

The fellow will shape the development of LEO NI and its research landscape, particularly the Areas of Research Interest (ARIs). They will also build research capabilities within DfE and NISRA to enable an ongoing research programme on education and economic outcomes using the LEO NI dataset.

It is expected the fellow will participate in LEO NI engagement events such as the LEO NI launch event with NISRA, policymakers from DfE and the Department of Education (DE), academics, GB LEO researchers and other stakeholders. They will be encouraged to develop foundations for longer-term collaborations with DfE’s policymakers and analytical professionals, to influence future policy-academia collaborations and to strengthen engagement with other government departments such as DE, the wider UK LEO network, the wider NISRA network and SEN stakeholders across the UK.

The fellow will be expected to disseminate results of their evidence-based research by, for example, Data Insight reports, Data Explained reports and publishing interim research in DfE’s research bulletin series as well as academic publications, subject to clearance processes. They may also deliver research presentations to DfE and NISRA officials and external stakeholders as part of DfE’s research seminar series or at relevant conferences. Other welcome outputs would be knowledge exchange activities and recommendations for new research.

Benefits for the fellow:

- The opportunity to influence policy thinking and analysis in an area of top government priority
- Experience of government ways of working and how policy is made to help target research more effectively
- Proximity to and experience of key debates in policymaking
- Building a network of official contacts in DfE and other government departments to influence policy with their future academic work
- Opportunity (working with DfE and sensitive to security and data requirements) to publish research based on unique access to data and experience offered by the fellowship

Person specification

Applications will be assessed by UKRI panel assessment against the following essential opportunity-specific requirements in addition to the generic eligibility and call criteria:

Essential criteria:

- A proven academic track record in a relevant discipline
- Expertise in appropriate research methodology
- Experience of the design, development, management and timely delivery of research
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Ability to translate expert knowledge, complex information, and research findings into meaningful advice to specialist and non-technical audiences to drive decision making and achieve impact

Applicants shortlisted from the panel assessment will be assessed at the host led interview selection process against the following desirable opportunity-specific requirements:

Desirable criteria:

- Experience of working with longitudinal datasets
- Experience of research using the LEO England dataset
- Experience of or demonstrated interest in SEN policy
- Expertise in stakeholder engagement and meaningful collaboration, in particular with government policymakers
- Experience of informing policy direction
- Fully Accredited Researcher under the Digital Economy Act (DEA) 2017

Processing personal data

If applicants are shortlisted by the UKRI assessment panel UKRI will need to share the application and any personal information that it contains with the host for the host led interview selection process.

Your personal data will be handled in line with UK data protection legislation and managed securely. If you would like to know more, including how to exercise your Rights, please see the UKRI [privacy notice](#).

The NI DfE's privacy notice can be found here: [NI DfE privacy notice](#). Hosts will delete your data at the end of the selection process unless you are successful, in which case we will retain your data as an independent data controller.