

UKRI policy fellowships 2025: fellowship position

Fellowship title: DfE: Children and Young People Thriving analytical fellowship

Fellowship type: Core policy fellowship

Host organisation: [Department for Education](#)

Host team: the role will sit in the Mental Health and Wellbeing team which is in the Schools and Pupil Analysis Division

Summary: opportunity to further develop the evidence base on children and young people thriving to improve policymaking in government

Policy topic: Opportunity for All: Every Child Achieving and Thriving

Research Council: ESRC

Academic discipline(s): social research, statistics, economics

Research career stage: open to early and 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: the role can be based in London, Sheffield, Manchester, Nottingham or Bristol. There will be some requirement to travel to meet other team members, this would be approximately four times within a year

Hybrid working: there is an expectation of office attendance two to three days a week. A DfE laptop can be provided enabling work from home or other sites, providing access to DfE systems. The line manager and main contact is based in Sheffield. In addition to office attendance, it would be useful to budget for travel from the main location (listed above) to Sheffield around four times in the placement year and once in the inception phase. There will be unit meetings, these may be in London, and it would be useful to cost for three of those. Eligible Travel and Subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details

Security clearance: Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS). This is expected to take up to four to six weeks from submission. 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. Please see [National security vetting: clearance levels](#) for more information

Fellowship description

This placement provides an excellent opportunity to undertake impactful work that will go to the heart of policymaking in government. The evidence base for thriving is underdeveloped, compared to many other areas of government policy. Children and young people who thrive more likely to attend school and subsequently achieve in their education. This role will help develop the evidence base on thriving. The role will be codesigned between the research fellow and the department. There will be the opportunity to produce original research.

Thriving is broad concept and there are proxies, such as School Belonging that occur in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other datasets, that can be applied to our research questions. We are currently developing our workplan on thriving and opportunities for analysis are developing as this plan takes shape. The research questions will evolve over time as new evidence is produced but currently our questions include:

- What works to improve thriving at school level?
- What works to improve thriving at a systems level?
- Why have thriving outcomes been getting worse?
- Which drivers have the most impact on thriving?
- How does thriving impact attendance and attainment?
- How do we support children and young people who are not in mainstream education?
- How does thriving, its drivers or what works differ across different groups of children and young people?
- What is the relationship between specific policy areas and thriving?
- How important are autonomy and accomplishment for thriving or additional outcomes?
- Does thriving impact on long-term outcomes such as adult wellbeing or employment?
- Can different school cultures support thriving in different ways?
- Can we segment and establish what works for different types of pupils?

This role will likely involve secondary analysis of existing data such as PISA, longitudinal surveys or school level data to develop our evidence base on the role of education in ensuring children and young people are thriving.

Some of our data sets are currently underutilised regarding this topic. Leveraging further insight from these data not only delivers evidence for policymaking but also increases the value for money of these investments and can help us make the case for continued support and investment in future years.

There will be an opportunity to collaborate with other areas of DfE and other departments to best exploit data opportunities.

Outputs will include analysis of existing data, development of replicable code and write up of findings in a policy friendly format. A key part of the role will be communicating and disseminating findings and accessible summaries of evidence to build the influence of the work in this area via slide packs, workshops and presentations including to senior representatives across government.

Outputs may be published by the department as full research reports, attributable to the author. It will also be possible to turn outputs into articles for publication in academic journals with DfE's clearance to ensure sensitive data is carefully managed.

Benefits to working within DfE:

The successful fellow will be fully embedded into the Pupil Analysis and Research Unit, being an integrated team member, attending relevant policy meetings, will have access to policy teams to refine research questions and discuss findings, influencing policymaking in real time. Access to relevant datasets will be supported. You will be considered part of the DfE analytical community and will be included in networking events and knowledge share sessions.

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:

- The ability to undertake quantitative analysis of large datasets, descriptive, regression or other methods to extract robust findings

- The ability to Quality Assure (QA) analytical work, and to work with others to support mutual QA processes
- The ability to network with policy and other analytical colleagues to undertake problem analysis and develop options for analytical work
- Ability to synthesis evidence, where possible to drive a compelling story to advise policy, while being clear of evidence limitations

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:

- An interest in children and young people's wellbeing and how this can drive attendance and attainment in education

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 DfE's privacy notice can be found here: [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.