



UKRI policy fellowships 2025: fellowship position

Fellowship title: Education Endowment Foundation post-16 education and training fellowship

Fellowship type: What Works innovation fellowship

Host organisation: [Education Endowment Foundation \(EEF\)](#)

Host team: Evaluation team

Summary: opportunity to enhance the understanding and evaluation of effective strategies to narrow the attainment gap for socioeconomically disadvantaged 16-19-year-old learners

Policy topic: Opportunity for All and Kickstarting Economic Growth

Research Council: ESRC

Academic discipline(s): education, social sciences (such as sociology or economics) or policy, quantitative methods, qualitative social research methods

Research career stage: open to all career stages

Fellowship structure

Inception phase:

Estimated start date: February 2026

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: our office is in Millbank Tower in Central London

Hybrid working: full-time EEF staff are expected to work from the office for a minimum of one day per week, usually on an agreed team day. The fellow will be placed in our Evaluation team, which meets weekly on Wednesdays. The preference is for team members to be there in person, but they can also attend online if, for example, they need to work from the office on another day to attend in-person meetings with colleagues in other teams or attend an external event. As such fellows can expect to travel once per week (to the office or another location) throughout the inception and placement phases, and potentially the knowledge exchange phase depending on the nature of dissemination activities, Alternate arrangements are possible and can be discussed with the fellow. Eligible Travel and Subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details

Security clearance: no security clearances are required to start the role. Depending on the development of the research, a basic Disclosure and Barring Service ([DBS](#)) check may be required

Fellowship description

The socioeconomic attainment gap widens as learners progress through the education system. According to [data from the Education Policy Institute](#), in 2023, disadvantaged pupils were 18.8 months behind their peers by the end of secondary school, while persistently disadvantaged pupils, those eligible for free school meals for at least 80 per cent of their time at school, were almost two years (22.7 months) behind. In this sense, the post-16 stage is our 'last chance' to try to boost many young people's life chances before they leave the education system.

Last year, the government committed £40 million to the EEF for building evidence-based practice in the post-16 sector. This additional funding will allow us to deepen our existing work on GCSE results while moving into other academic, technical and vocational study programmes. In our [first phase of this new work](#), we've been laying the groundwork for our expanded remit by consulting and collaborating with post-16 settings, academics, and other stakeholders to understand the key challenges the sector faces in supporting socioeconomically disadvantaged learners. We are currently undertaking several pieces of research to help us determine the scope of our future research in the sector and feed into the development of our long-term strategy.

We are looking for a fellow to work on such a research project within the priority areas we have identified to date, which include transition from school to post-16, learner attendance and engagement, English and Maths attainment and teacher recruitment and retention. We are open to fellows proposing their own research questions within these priority areas, according to their interests and expertise.

Across all of our priority areas and our post-16 work more generally, we are focused on:

- Working with colleges, educators and other sector stakeholders to identify their most pressing challenges and codevelop solutions that are both practical and effective
- Supporting policymakers in their missions to build young peoples' skills and increase the number achieving higher level qualifications (Opportunity for All), as well train the workforce we need (Kickstarting Economic Growth), by generating evidence on 'what works' in these areas
- Narrowing the socioeconomic disadvantage gap among 16-19-year-old learners to improve their life chances

As such, research could include:

- Enhancing our understanding of teaching and learning in technical and vocational programmes of study to support our evidence generation in this area
- Enhancing our understanding of the learner experience around attendance and engagement to support our evidence generation in this area
- Reviewing the strategies used by post-16 providers with higher-than-expected attainment outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged learners, with the aim of identifying innovative solutions and refining these into recommendations for practice
- Reviewing existing literature or practice in a given priority area, drawing out promising strategies and their impact as well as exploring how they could be successfully implemented and evaluated
- Codeveloping and testing strategies in a given priority area, with the aim of increasing the availability of evidence-based approaches and their adoption at scale

We expect the outputs from this fellowship to contribute to building the limited evidence base for post-16 education and training and shaping our research agenda in this space. It will directly support policymakers, post-16 providers and learners all over England, as they will both codesign and participate in the research and have access to findings, which we will publish on our website and disseminate at EEF conferences, knowledge exchanges and forums (held at both the national and regional level), as well as events hosted by stakeholders we actively engage with in the sector and international partners. The fellow will subsequently also have the opportunity to publish their own research based on the fellowship, notifying the EEF and sharing a final draft prior to publication.

In addition to the support they will receive through dedicated line-management and from colleagues in the Evaluation, Post-16, Policy and other teams, the fellow will benefit from a range of rich developmental opportunities throughout the fellowship. These will include a detailed organisational induction programme, a range of learning opportunities, presentations and workshops that are available to all EEF staff, and wider networking opportunities both within and beyond the EEF.

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:

- Academic background in education, social sciences (such as sociology or economics) or social policy, social research methods
- Proficiency in the specific method relevant to the research (for example, experience conducting literature reviews or evidence synthesis or experience collecting and analysing qualitative and quantitative data)
- Excellent report writing or presentation skills

- A commitment to, and interest in, the aims of the EEF and What Works Network
- Ability to act on own initiative, with agility and flexibility
- Willingness to collaborate as part of a high-functioning team
- Ability to engage effectively and credibly with a range of stakeholders, both internal and external
- Experience leading, or contributing to, knowledge exchange activities

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:

- Understanding of post-16 education and training, as well as general sector context
- Subject matter expertise relevant to the research
- Experience designing, running or analysing impact evaluations (such as randomised controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs) or implementation and process evaluations

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 EEF's privacy notice can be found here: [EEF privacy notices](#). 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.