

UKRI policy fellowships 2025: fellowship position

Fellowship title: Ofsted inspection improvement evaluation fellowship

Fellowship type: Core policy fellowship

Host organisation: [Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills \(Ofsted\)](#)

Host team: Research and Evaluation Team, Insights and Research Directorate

Summary: Ofsted has launched proposals for a significant reform programme to change how we inspect early years, state-funded schools, non-association independent schools, further education and skills, and Initial Teacher Education (ITE). The reforms will be evaluated, in line with the standards and expectations set by the Cabinet Office and the HM Treasury Evaluation Task Force. The fellow's work will contribute to ensuring Ofsted's reform programme has a positive impact on those we inspect and regulate, and, on children and learners

Policy topic: education, education standards, evaluation (implementation and impact), equity and access, the Opportunity Mission (breaking the link between a child's background and their future success)

Research Council: ESRC

Academic discipline(s): evaluation and social research in education

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: Ofsted's Insights and Research Directorate, within which the fellow will be hosted, has most significant staff presence in our Bristol and London (Canary Wharf) offices. As such, we prefer candidates who can be based in one of these locations. However, we will also consider candidates based in Birmingham where we also have an office. There may occasionally be a need to travel to other Ofsted offices across England, particularly the London office if not based there

Hybrid working: Ofsted operates a hybrid working approach. This allows colleagues to benefit from time in the office, with the flexibility to also work from home. Our expectation is that the fellow will spend at least 60% of their time working in the office, or at external meetings or events. The exact balance will be discussed and agreed between the fellow and their line manager during the inception phase.

We anticipate that during the inception phase, the fellow will need to travel to the office approximately three times for in-person meetings (once per month). The first in-person meeting will be at the start of the inception phase, at which

the fellow will meet their line manager and receive their Ofsted IT equipment. Subsequent in-person meetings during the inception phase will focus on codesigning the fellowship project. 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) is required and usually takes around six weeks. We would 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 by ESRC and so, ideally, before the inception phase begins. Please see [National security vetting: clearance levels](#) for more information

Additionally, we have identified this role as one which requires an enhanced criminal record check via the Disclosure and Barring Service ([DBS](#)). The evaluation activities that are part of this role may bring candidates into direct contact with children or vulnerable adults and may also give candidates access to material or sensitive information about children or vulnerable adults

Fellowship description

The fellowship will begin in February 2026, shortly after we change our approach to inspecting education and ITE and shortly before changes to our social care inspections take effect. There is significant scope for the fellow to have an impact on Ofsted's frameworks, policy and practice by supporting our programme of evaluation around these reforms.

Last year, we carried out the biggest consultation in Ofsted's history, the [Big Listen](#), and have set three specific objectives as a result:

1. Reset our relationship with those we regulate and inspect, working collaboratively with them to put children and learners first
2. Foster a culture of integrity in which we always treat people with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect
3. Be a learning organisation that operates transparently, listens to challenge and takes action to change

We have already made some significant changes to the way we work, based on what we heard. For example, schools are notified on a Monday if they will have a routine inspection that week and no longer receive an 'overall effectiveness' grade. We have launched the Ofsted Academy to improve the quality of recruitment and training of our workforce and improve the quality of inspections and regulation.

But the biggest changes are still to come. We will change the way we inspect, starting with early years, schools, and further education and skills inspections in November 2025 and ITE inspections in January 2026. Changes to children's social care inspections will follow in 2026.

In February 2025, we launched a public consultation on our proposed reforms to inspecting early years, state-funded schools, non-association independent schools, further education and skills and ITE. The consultation will run for 12 weeks, from 3 February to 28 April. We invited responses to five proposals:

1. Report cards to give parents and carers more detailed information than the current reports. These would include a new five-point grading scale to evaluate more areas of a provider's work and short summaries of what inspectors found
2. Education inspection toolkits to show providers and inspectors the evaluation areas that we will focus inspections on and how we will assess and grade providers
3. Inspection methodology changes. For example, a move away from the 'deep-dive' methodology which is currently used and towards a more collaborative, flexible approach dependent on the context of the provider and the nature of the inspection
4. Full inspections and monitoring inspections of state-funded schools. We plan to end ungraded inspections of state-funded schools and change our monitoring programmes so that we can check that timely action is taken to raise standards
5. A new approach to identifying state-funded schools causing concern and how we will place a school into a category of concern

In line with the standards and expectations set by the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury Evaluation Task Force, we intend to carry out a programme of evaluation spanning multiple years to assess the reforms we adopt. This evaluation will support our commitment to being an evidence-led, learning organisation. It will help us learn from and improve our policy, practice and training to make sure we have the best impact we can, both on those we inspect and regulate, and on children and learners. It will align with and support the government's Opportunity Mission to break the link between a child's background and their future success.

The fellow would work on one substantial element of a wider evaluation plan that is led by Ofsted's Research and Evaluation Team and may also include other components of in-house or commissioned evaluation. The fellow will help to develop the associated research and evidence base, design robust evaluation methods, develop connections

between Ofsted and the research community, and ultimately have a central role in translating evidence into policy and practice for the benefit of children and learners across the country.

A fellow would benefit from:

- Codesign of the fellowship project with Ofsted analysts, policy and strategy and communications colleagues, to ensure the project makes the most of our insights, is firmly policy-driven and stands to have the greatest possible impact on policy and practice
- Collaboration with and support and oversight from Ofsted's Insights and Research Directorate, potentially including analyst resource to support research projects
- Proximity to interesting and topical policy and delivery decisions at a national scale
- The opportunity to inform and influence HM Chief Inspector at the Office of Standards (HMCI) and Ofsted's Executive Board
- Experience of civil service, Ofsted, Department for Education, and sector 'ways of working', to help 'land' research effectively
- Access to a network of policy, analysis and research teams in Ofsted and across government
- Access to national datasets and information (for use whilst in post only, and subject to security clearances)
- Our support with publishing research papers and outputs in academic journals and peer-reviewed publications subject to clearance by Ofsted

Specific deliverables will be agreed during the inception phase of the fellowship and will depend on the policy topic(s) being prioritised. Potential activities could include:

- Designing and undertaking evaluation activities that require collecting primary data and analysing secondary data
- Advising on best evaluation approaches to use, for example, theory based
- Creating evidence summaries, reviews and analysis to meet key policy and operational needs
- Examining the existing and emerging evidence regarding education standards across Ofsted's remits
- Developing and challenging others' development of credible evidence-based assumptions about proposals and plans
- Supporting the development of Ofsted's capacity and capability in mixed methods research
- Designing and organising workshops in order to provide academic challenge and rigour
- Conducting evidence-based horizon scanning exercises

We envisage the fellow will carry out an evaluation project in one or more areas pertinent to Ofsted's inspection improvement reforms. The focus and scope would be codesigned and agreed during the inception phase, drawing on the fellow's area(s) of expertise. Indicative policy and research challenges might include:

- Education inspection toolkits: generate evidence regarding the implementation and impact of the new toolkits and inspection methodology, including a focus on consistency and reliability both overall and by evaluation area
- Evaluating the impact of report cards on parental decision-making around education
- Inclusive practice such as improving understanding of how well-prepared inspectors are to evaluate inclusive practice or contributing to the evidence base on the impact of the inclusion judgement on outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and learners

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:

- Subject matter expertise relevant to Ofsted education research, for example, expertise in relation to early years, primary, secondary, or post-16 education or expertise in cross-remit priorities including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or disadvantage and vulnerability, or knowledge of international evidence on education standards
- Experience of the design, development, management and timely delivery of education research and evaluation
- Experience, knowledge and understanding of the theory and practice of evaluation methodologies and approaches, both process and impact evaluations

- Experience of or openness to working collaboratively with other departments (such as policy, legal, strategy, communications) and the wider research and practice communities
- Proven ability to deliver knowledge exchange activity, communicating and presenting technical and complex analysis to non-technical audiences, both orally and in writing

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:

- Familiarity with Ofsted's thinking behind approaches to inspection (and, where relevant, regulation), in relation to early years, primary, secondary, post-16 education, or cross-remit priorities such as SEND
- Familiarity with the government's [Green Book](#) and [Magenta Book](#)
- Experience of developing team or organisational capability
- Knowledge or experience of education reform and political priorities

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](#).

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