

UKRI policy fellowships 2025: fellowship position

Fellowship title: Welsh Government defining and measuring quality in childcare research fellowship

Fellowship type: Core policy fellowship

Host organisation: [Welsh Government](#)

Host team: Children, Families and Childcare Evidence Team (a multidisciplinary analytical team, based within the Communities and Social Justice Division of the Welsh Government)

Summary: opportunity to review the evidence about quality in early years childcare provision in Wales to support key drivers of opportunity, health, economic growth and productivity

Policy topic: childcare, play, early years, childcare standards and early years childcare

Research Council: ESRC

Academic discipline(s): social or economic research, statistical analysis, policy evaluation and policy impact studies

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: UK-based remote working. Occasional travel to Welsh Government offices would be beneficial. The team run quarterly anchor days where presence in the Cardiff office to attend in person is preferred but not essential

Hybrid working: flexible with opportunity to discuss remote and hybrid working arrangements with the successful applicant during the inception phase. 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 level Disclosure and Barring Service ([DBS](#)) check. 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. Ideally the security clearance process would be completed before the inception phase begins

Fellowship description

High level overview:

The Welsh Government has a commitment to ensure there is opportunity for every family and that every family has the chance to succeed. The Welsh Government currently funds childcare through the Childcare Offer for Wales and Flying Start programmes. Understanding how quality in childcare impacts children and their families and what encourages families to take up funded childcare are key contributors to meeting this commitment.

Wider literature suggests that childcare provides a range of child development benefits but that it is quality of the childcare that is key in determining the extent of this. There is an evidence gap about what quality means in this context in Wales and how this can be measured.

Being able to substantiate how quality should be considered and measured in childcare would support early years childcare provision across the Welsh Government. It is crucial to help inform future policy decisions and help us understand the contribution current cabinet priorities make to the priority of opportunity for all.

It is anticipated that the outcome from this fellowship will be at least one Government Social Research (GSR) report which will be published on the Welsh Government's website, in line with the GSR publications protocol. This will require a briefing to the Minister and Cabinet Secretary on the report and recommendations, as well as liaising with communication and press colleagues to handle media interest in the report.

We are also supportive of academic publications and dissemination activity such as conference presentations. Please note we require to see articles or presentations for consideration in advance of submission to a journal or other publisher and reserve the right to amend factual inaccuracies.

This role will form part of Welsh GSR profession, where links and collaboration within the cross-government GSR community will be encouraged.

This role will include the opportunity to work across multiple areas of Welsh Government, with staff at all levels including senior officials and in some cases Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers, Special Advisors and external stakeholders and specialists (for example, academics).

The fellow will be encouraged to take up training and professional development opportunities as appropriate, including Welsh Government GSR knowledge sharing events. This could include both training opportunities from within the Welsh Government GSR profession and from the wider GSR profession.

Role of the fellow:

Previous research undertaken by the Department for Education (Study of Early Education and Development (SEED)¹: Study of Quality of Early Years Provision in England) presents measurement of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings in terms of structural and process quality. It is envisaged that investigating how this could be adapted for measurement of quality in Wales would be the main focus of this fellowship.

It is expected that the specific activities will be agreed upon commencement of the fellowship. The fellow will help to codesign the research plan for the main placement matching their interests and expertise with the policy questions of the host department in line with current Welsh Government commitments and any changes to the early years childcare provision that come about following the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) Elections in 2026. It is expected that childcare and provision of childcare in the early years will continue to be a key feature in the next Senedd term. Exploring quality in relation to childcare provision will be integral to effective delivery of Welsh Government commitments.

Key tasks are likely to include:

- Reviewing literature on existing studies, such as the SEED in England and consider what could be implemented in Wales
- Facilitating workshops with a range of stakeholders to explore their views on quality (for example, Welsh Government officials, childcare practitioners, Care Inspectorate Wales, local authorities, Estyn)
- Reviewing data from Care Inspectorate Wales including inspection ratings and data in the Self-Assessment of Service Statement (SASS) returns, such as the take up of different types of childcare

¹ [Department for Education](#) - Study of Early Education and Development (SEED): Study of Quality of Early Years Provision in England (Revised) Research Brief 2018.

- Writing a report, to be published by the Welsh Government, on the findings and recommendations for next steps when considering how quality can be defined and measured
- Presenting findings to Welsh Government officials and stakeholders

Person specification

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

Essential criteria:

- Demonstrates thorough knowledge and applied experience of the required research methodology
- Experience of design, development, management and timely delivery of research
- Holds a track record of collaboration with the wider research community and helping others make good use of research evidence
- Proven ability to effectively communicate and present complex research, including for the purposes of advice or recommendation

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 developing effective communication links with other researchers and analysts to provide appropriate collaborative support to research
- Experience of stimulating interest in research and its applications and persuading others of the value of the research to the policy process
- Demonstrates an understanding of the devolved policy context in Wales

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 Welsh Government's privacy notice can be found here: [Welsh Government 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.