



UKRI Policy Fellowships 2026

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

DCMS freelance careers in the creative industries fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

[Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#)

Host team:

Creative Industries/AI Directorate Skills Team

Academic discipline/s:

Creative industries, economics, business and management, cultural and media studies, cultural policy

Summary:

Opportunity to complement the work of the DCMS's Freelance Champion to provide research, analysis and expertise, aligned with the UK Industrial Strategy Creative Industries Sector Plan commitments to support freelancers and similar workers.

Policy topic:

Freelancers in the creative Industries are the subject of several of DCMS's ARIs, and the creative industries is an IS-8 Sector.

Research career stage:

Open to early and mid-career researchers

Fellowship structure

The fellowship is estimated to begin in May 2027. The exact date will be confirmed by the host depending on onboarding and security clearance requirements. The fellowship will have three phases:

- inception: duration is 3 months at 0.4 FTE
- main placement: duration is 12 months at 0.6-1 FTE
- knowledge exchange: duration is 3 months at 0.4 FTE

Work arrangements

Location requirements:

The role can be based in DCMS's London or Manchester office. There will be some requirement to travel to meet other team members, this would be approximately four times within a year.

Hybrid working:

Whilst DCMS has a 60% minimum office working requirement in line with the rest of the UK Civil Service, we would be content for a minimum one day a week office attendance, at any location listed above, during the main placement phase. A laptop will be provided enabling work from home or other sites, providing access to host systems. In addition to office attendance, the fellow should budget for travel to London or Manchester around four times during the placement phase and once in 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 and nationality eligibility criteria:

A Fellow working from the DCMS London Office, is required to obtain Counter Terrorism Clearance (CTC). For CTC, we recommend allowing for a minimum of three months processing time. Security clearance required for the Manchester Office is Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS), we recommend allowing a minimum of two months processing time. Please note that vetting may take longer for applicants who have resided outside of the United Kingdom. Please see [National security vetting: clearance levels](#) for more information.

This job is broadly open to the following groups: UK nationals; nationals of the Republic of Ireland; nationals of Commonwealth countries who have the right to work in the UK; nationals of the EU, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein and family members of those nationalities with settled or pre-settled status under the [European Union Settlement Scheme \(EUSS\)](#); nationals of the EU, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein and family members of those nationalities who have made a valid application for settled or pre-settled status under the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS); individuals with limited leave to remain or indefinite leave to remain who were eligible to apply for EUSS on or before 31 December 2020; Turkish nationals, and certain family members of Turkish nationals, who have accrued the right to work in the Civil Service. [Further information on nationality requirements.](#)

Fellowship position description

Freelancers are an important part of the creative industries. The Creative Industries (CIs) have over double the number of self-employed workers (27.9%) as a proportion of the workforce compared to the rest of the economy (14.5%), and a higher proportion (50%) of the cultural sector are self-employed. DCMS has committed to supporting freelancers and DCMS will shortly be announcing the appointment of a Freelance Champion to advocate for freelancers across a range of DCMS's policies. They will develop a workplan for publication in September 2026. This appointment is part of a package of policy interventions outlined in the [UK Industrial Strategy Creative Industries Sector Plan](#). Research support for the delivery of the Sector Plan also includes the AHRC's Creative Clusters programme, research co-delivered with the AHRC Creative PEC, alongside broader creative industries research themes set out in DCMS's Areas of Research Interests. In this context, DCMS seeks to appoint a UKRI Policy Fellow to provide research support and expertise on a variety of questions facing creative industries freelancers. Although freelance, and related, forms of work offer flexibility and other types of benefits, individual workers face challenges, such as insecure and unpredictable income streams and workflows, poor contracting practices, lack of recognition for work, and unpaid additional hours to deliver projects. These challenges have implications for the UK's cultural and creative economy as a whole. Existing academic and internal DCMS research has identified several of these challenges that are unique to freelancers, along with issues that are common across all areas of the creative industries.

The challenges facing freelance creatives relate to a range of research questions. Examples include: What are the distinct features of creative freelancers/the self-employed compared to those in the wider economy, including difference in approach to contractual arrangements, remuneration models, types of earnings (royalties vs. sales), and skills development? How to get an accurate picture of different contractual

arrangements, employment and tax statuses of creative freelancers, and how these differ by subsectors? To what extent freelancers move between different types of contract (or balance different types of contracts simultaneously), employment and tax statuses and what affects decisions for a particular status? What is the distribution, median and range of wages/earnings in the creative industries including between freelancers and employees? How does this vary by occupation and are there differences in pay between the same occupation, within and outside the creative industries? What skills development issues are facing freelance workers, and how can these be most effectively addressed?

All of these specific research questions are framed by DCMS's overarching interest in growth of the creative industries sector, career sustainability and a more diverse creative industries workforce. Another important policy and research question is ensuring that consideration of freelancers is included in DCMS interventions on careers and diversity.

We envisage the fellow will carry out a research project in one, or more, of these research questions, with the specific scope to be agreed as part of the inception phase. This will build on foundational research that DCMS intends to carry out in 2026, designed to fill initial evidence gaps identified by the Freelance Champion. The fellow will work with DCMS's Creative Industries Skills Team, and other relevant teams to co-produce the contents of the project and the approach. The fellow will also work closely with the Freelance Champion for the first half of their placement (until the appointment reaches completion in October 2027), to co-create research that will complement their workplan priorities and enhance the legacy of the post.

DCMS has a record of successfully hosting UKRI Policy Fellowships that have enabled fellows to enhance their knowledge and capacity to inform policy and analysis through their research. DCMS is committed to offering fellows access to a range of professional development during their placement, that include:

- contact with a range of government professions (policy, strategy, science, analysis) and key stakeholders across government
- the opportunity to influence policy thinking and analysis in a government priority area
- experience of government ways of working
- building a network of contacts with officials, as well as building visibility as an academic expert in government
- access to internally run professional development training sessions
- subject to agreement and internal clearance processes, there may be an opportunity to publish research on GOV.UK

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 track record in academic research in business and management, economics, cultural and media studies, cultural policy, or cognate domain
- detailed subject matter expertise on work and labour in the creative industries
- the ability to synthesise a range of quantitative and qualitative data using relevant methods, and familiarity with relevant datasets for this synthesis

Applicants shortlisted from the panel assessment will be invited to a host led interview. At this stage the host will also take into account the following desirable fellowship-specific requirements

Desirable criteria:

- knowledge of employment law and regulations for freelance, and related, types of work
- understanding and awareness of creative industries policy in the UK and other national contexts
- subsector expertise in one of the fields highlighted in the Creative Industries Sector Plan

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](#).

Please see the Hosts' [privacy notice](#) and they 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.