



UKRI policy fellowships 2026

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

DfE pandemic preparedness fellowship

Fellowship type:

Natural hazards and resilience fellowship

Host organisation:

[Department for Education](#)

Host team:

Science Unit; Resilience, Response & Emergency Preparedness

Academic disciplines:

Public health, data science, social science, behavioural science, economics

Summary:

Opportunity to develop the evidence base on age-related impacts of restricted school attendance, helping inform future pandemic preparedness policy.

Policy topic:

Opportunity mission, pandemic preparedness

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 at any of the Department for Education's (DfE) offices: Bristol, Cambridge, Coventry, Darlington, London, Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield. The line manager is based in Bristol; colleagues are

based primarily in London and Sheffield. There will be some requirement to travel to meet team members at other DfE offices, this would be approximately four times within a year.

Hybrid working:

Whilst the DfE has a three-days a week minimum office working requirement in line with the rest of the UK civil service, we are happy to be flexible about this depending on individual circumstances. Please be aware that this role can only be worked in the UK and not from overseas.

A laptop will be provided by the DfE, enabling work from home or other DfE sites, and providing access to host systems. In addition to office attendance, it would be useful to budget for travel to other DfE offices around four times in the placement year 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:

Basic Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) is required, which 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 UKRI. Inception phase may be able to begin before the security clearance process is completed but will be required for the main placement phase. Please see [national security vetting: clearance levels](#) for more information.

Individuals from overseas will only be considered if they have no restrictions on their right to work in the UK, or if they have, it will be possible to remove or modify these to allow the fellowship to take place.

Fellowship position description

This fellowship will aim to generate robust evidence to inform future pandemic and crisis-related policies, with a specific focus on the impact of restrictions to school attendance (and possibly to attendance at other education settings) on children and young people of different ages. This work will sit at the interface of public health, data science, social science, behavioural science and education research to generate a comprehensive evidence base for future pandemic and crisis-preparedness policy, for example helping to inform decisions on which school years to prioritise for face-to-face school attendance. We envisage the fellow will carry out a research project in the areas of interest below with the scope and methodology to be co-designed by the fellow, based on their interests and expertise, and the host team, based on their priorities, as part of the inception phase. Methodology should incorporate quantitative and qualitative analysis, and could include mixed effects modelling as well as primary data collection.

Areas of interest include:

- exploring age-specific evidence on short-and long-term impacts of sustained disruption to attainment, wellbeing, and attendance
- consideration of how these vary across pupil groups, including disadvantaged learners, English as an additional language (EAL) pupils, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) learners, and those with inconsistent digital access, with a view to mitigating the disadvantage gap
- comparing academic, social and mental health outcomes for pupils offered in-person provision with those learning remotely and assess which models of remote education deliver the strongest results across pupil groups
- exploring the role of educational settings as the primary mechanism for identifying early safeguarding concerns, and how restricted attendance affect the identification of vulnerabilities among children and young people

The fellowship will provide the DfE with high-quality, policy-ready evidence to support future pandemic- and crisis-preparedness by:

- supporting prioritisation decisions for any future attendance restrictions and reopening strategies
- strengthening the DfE's ability to design proportionate, evidence-driven targeted interventions that enable safeguarding and protect pupils' long-term outcomes during future pandemics, helping to prevent widening inequalities during periods of disruption

- assessing the academic effectiveness of online learning across core subjects (literacy, numeracy, and secondary subject specialisms) and identify which approaches work best for different ages and learner needs. This could be used to inform which new or improved digital tools, EdTech, are needed to support a high quality national remote education offer for future disruptions or pandemics

The fellowship will provide successful candidates with the following:

- the opportunity to codesign, produce and publish original research, ensuring that findings contribute to wider scientific and policy discussions
- the opportunity to inform and influence DfE and wider government policy on important pandemic preparedness issues, and to gain an in-depth understanding of the policy process
- access to internal DfE datasets, including attendance and attainment data, for use in the project
- being fully integrated as a member of the DfE Science Advice Team within the Central Analysis and Research Division, with a dedicated line manager and inclusion in any directorate/unit/team meetings relevant to their work; as well as access to the wider analytical community in the DfE
- working closely with the Resilience, Response & Emergency Preparedness Division, attending any directorate/unit/team meetings relevant to their work
- access to a wider network of policy, analysis, other experts and opportunities to engage with government departments and aligned organisations
- access to any relevant knowledge exchange opportunities such as policy roundtables, cross-government workshops and wider networks

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 academic track record in education research, public health, data science, social science, behavioural science or economics
- subject matter expertise in specific topics related to the fellowship such as public health, social science, economics or education research, and wellbeing
- strong analytical skills relating to the opportunity (for example, the ability to synthesise a range of quantitative and qualitative data, including using statistical and data science methods)

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:

- very strong interpersonal skills and a collaborative approach to working
- experience of building networks and strong working relationships with people from a range of professional backgrounds
- ability to influence senior colleagues

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.