

UKRI policy fellowships 2026

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Environment Agency place-based impacts of the net zero transition fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

[Environment Agency](#)

Host team:

Net Zero and Circular Economy Research Programme within the Chief Scientist's Group

Academic discipline/s:

Social sciences, behavioural science, geography, environmental science

Summary:

Opportunity to advise on how the net zero transition affects places and communities, applying multidisciplinary evidence and novel methods to track how communities perceive and experience environmental changes in the net zero transition, informing evidence-based policy decisions.

Policy topic:

The proposed fellowship focuses on the net zero energy transition and its societal impacts and primarily supports the Government's Clean Energy Superpower mission and the Clean Energy Industries sector of the IS-8 which prioritises accelerating the transition to secure, low carbon energy while safeguarding environmental and societal outcomes. It also supports the Economic Growth mission as net zero is part of the UK agenda for sustainable, productivity-driven growth yet public acceptance and fairness influence investment certainty and deployment speed. It also aligns with the Net Zero strategy through helping to drive productivity, innovation and green economic growth.

Net zero and circular economy approaches are fundamental to the UK's sustainable growth agenda, helping ensure that new technologies, business models and resource efficient practices can be deployed in ways that are fair, futureproof and environmentally responsible.

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 fellow will join a national team working across multiple locations, including Wallingford, Bristol, London, Newcastle and Manchester. The team primarily meets online, with quarterly in-person meetings, usually in Birmingham or Bristol. The fellow will be welcome to work in an Environment Agency (EA) / Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Group hub office local to them and to attend quarterly in-person team meetings.

Hybrid working:

Hybrid working is available for both the inception and placement phase. It is not expected that the fellow would be required to work in an EA Office if home working most of the time is preferred. However, the fellow would benefit from co-location with research team members on a regular (at least monthly) basis and may wish to work more frequently in an EA office to better understand the work of the organisation. Eligible travel and subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details.

To support their day-to-day work, the fellow will be provided with full access to the EA's IT systems, in the same way we onboard seconded contractors. They will receive an EA email address, laptop, Office365 access, and will be added to all relevant mailing lists, internal webinars, Teams channels and programme communications so they can stay fully connected with the team's activities.

Security clearance and nationality eligibility criteria:

Basic Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) checks and, if London based, Counter Terrorism Check (CTC). We would ask the person taking up this fellowship opportunity to start the security clearance application process as soon as their fellowship has been confirmed. The inception phase may begin whilst clearance is underway but must be complete before the 12-month placement phase can begin. Please see [national security vetting: clearance](#) levels for further information.

Fellowship position description

Net zero and circular economy approaches are fundamental to the UK's sustainable growth agenda, helping ensure that new technologies, business models and resource efficient practices can be deployed in ways that are fair, futureproof and environmentally responsible.

This fellowship will lead innovative, multidisciplinary research to understand how the net zero transition affects the environment and consequently communities and places over time. Co-designed with the fellow during the inception phase, original research will explore how people perceive environmental impacts of the transition - such as changes in air quality, land use, or local environmental risks - and how these perceptions shape public acceptance, experience, and trust in regulation and governance. Working closely with Environment Agency teams, the fellow will generate place-based insights on perceptions, distributional impacts, and social risks and co-benefits to support fair, effective and publicly supported net zero decision-making.

The fellow would add value by providing an evidence-based, systematic exploration of:

- how the net zero transition is experienced in a specific place or sector, drawing on multidisciplinary evidence and novel analysis
- how quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods alongside novel research approaches such as digital ethnography, participatory mapping, and machine assisted text analysis of public discourse can aid our understanding of social challenges
- how environmental and social impacts are perceived by communities, and how this affects acceptance, trust and the success of low carbon deployment
- how existing EA and academic evidence can be translated into policy-ready insights to support the Government's Clean Energy Superpower mission and sustainable growth agenda

Anticipated outcomes:

A dedicated fellow and project would:

- strengthen the EA's capability to use interdisciplinary evidence on social and environmental impacts in net zero planning and regulatory advice
- produce a small number of focused, high quality analytical outputs including peer-reviewed journal articles, such as a place-based case study and an evidence briefing that can be applied to analogous areas
- strengthen links between EA teams and academics through the fellow's participation in academic conferences, workshops, and networks including the EA's Social Science Profession and Science Profession
- connect EA teams with relevant academic expertise, improving access to cutting edge research, novel research approaches, and supporting longer-term collaboration.
- increase visibility of the social and community dimensions of net zero, ensuring they are considered alongside technical and environmental evidence in early policy development
- improve understanding within the social science community of how environmental policy decisions that affect society are made

Benefits to the fellow:

- embedded in EA multi-disciplinary research team, gaining direct experience with live projects and programmes
- opportunities to publish peer-reviewed papers and produce policy-facing outputs
- direct engagement with policy teams linking research to decision-making
- involvement in steering groups and project co-design with policy and operational colleagues
- opportunity to build professional networks through the EA's Social Science Profession and Science Profession
- insight into how social science informs regulation, net zero and environmental policy
- opportunities to present at conferences and expand academic and policy profile
- potential for longer-term collaborations with EA and policy partners

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:

- demonstrated experience of designing, conducting and/or leading high-quality research relevant to the social and environmental dimensions of the net zero transition such as how environmental change and policy decisions are experienced by communities, places or sectors
- strong knowledge and experience of applying relevant quantitative, qualitative and/or mixed methods, with clear evidence of ability to apply innovative, novel or interdisciplinary approaches (e.g. participatory, digital or computational methods) to applied challenges
- experience of engaging effectively with diverse stakeholders, supported by strong communication, collaboration and relationship-building skills

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 the social and environmental dimensions of the net zero transition
- an understanding of the role of the EA in supporting and enabling the net zero transition
- a commitment to contributing positively to team effectiveness, collaboration, and an inclusive working culture

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.