

# UKRI policy fellowships 2026

## Fellowship position

### Fellowship title:

Food Standards Agency understanding of the risks associated with ultra processed foods fellowship

### Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

### Host organisation:

[Food Standards Agency \(FSA\)](#)

### Host team:

Science Evidence and Research Division (SERD)

### Academic discipline/s:

Food science, toxicology, epidemiology, dietary science, public health.

### Summary:

To build a robust evidence base on the potential risks associated with ultra processed foods (UPFs) and policy responses at an international level, including the impact of those policies, to inform future policy development and any required risk management actions.

### Policy topic:

As outlined in its' [strategy](#), the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is committed to protect public health by ensuring Food is Safe, as part of its 'Food you can trust' mission. The need for evidence to better understand risks in the food system is highlighted in the FSA's [Areas of research interest | Food Standards Agency](#). Future research priorities were published in 2025, within the [Annual FSA Science Update | Food Standards Agency](#). This explicitly referenced our interest in gathering more evidence on ultra processed foods (UPFs), in particular understanding better the association between consumption of these foods and health outcomes. The FSA has specifically noted the large amount of research which is taking place on this topic in the UK and internationally and have committed to acting when any new evidence emerges in other international regulatory bodies.

### 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 FSA actively supports remote/home-based working and hence the fellow can work from any location within the UK (but not overseas). The FSA has offices located in London, York, Cardiff and Belfast, and there is an expectation to attend face-to-face meetings at one or more of those offices, as required.

### Hybrid working:

The expectation is that the FSA would offer this fellowship on a remote/home-based basis, but with a requirement of office attendance 1-2 times per month. It is likely that this would be London and/or York, but occasionally Cardiff and/or Belfast.

Appropriate IT equipment can be provided enabling work from home or other sites, providing access to host systems.

In addition to office attendance, it would be useful to budget for travel to other UK locations up to six 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:

Government Baseline 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 can begin before the security clearance process is completed but will be required for the main placement phase. Please see [National security vetting: clearance levels - GOV.UK](#) for more information.

Applicants must comply with Home Office/UK Visa and Immigration requirements and hold a valid work permit covering the duration of the fellowship where appropriate. Applicants who require a visa must ensure this is in place before the start date of the award and covers the full duration of the fellowship. Please note the Food Standards Agency does not offer visa sponsorship and cannot provide advice on visa applications. For further details on this please visit: [Visas and immigration - GOV.UK](#).

## Fellowship position description

### Overview:

- over recent years, [ultra processed foods \(UPFs\)](#) have emerged as a major food issue, attracting the attention of [policy makers](#) and concerns amongst [consumers](#)
- as highlighted in the 2025 [SACN Processed foods and health rapid evidence review](#), there is an association between higher consumption of UPFs and poor health outcomes. The potential causes

of harm are complex and most likely multi-factorial. The mechanisms behind these health impacts remain opaque and there are many different hypotheses proposed

- alongside hypotheses related to the associated nutritional properties of UPFs (e.g. low fibre, high fat, sugar and salt), one hypothesis is that food additives, commonly used as ingredients in UPFs, may have detrimental impacts: either alone or in combination
- given the growing concern, breadth of emerging research and potential risks, there is a pressing need for clear evidence that could help steer future policy and regulator approaches. In its role as the food safety regulator, the FSA has an obligation to review new research linked to food safety, and hence its specific interest in the role that additives may play
- there is a large body of ongoing research into mechanisms which might underpin risks associated with UPF consumption, in the UK and internationally, and on the impacts of policy interventions which are being considered or have been implemented in other countries

## Co-design and collaboration:

- we are looking for a fellow to review and summarise ongoing research in this area, including evidence related to policy interventions which are being considered or planned internationally and evidence for their impacts. This will provide the knowledge to support evidence-based policy making and inform future risk management decisions
- we would work with the fellow to co-design a programme of research focused on the potential harms associated with UPFs and the possible role of food additives, and the impact of policy interventions internationally; looking to synthesise, review and analyse new and existing data and research
- we also envisage the fellow will work with the FSA to develop its future science and research strategy in this field
- there is also the potential for connection with other initiatives, for example with Smart Data Research UK, particularly NPM Calculator Nutrient Profile Model [NPM Calculator Nutrient Profile Model Calculator](#).

## Benefits of the Fellowship:

- opportunity to co-design, produce and publish original research, ensuring that findings contribute to wider scientific, policy and regulatory discussions
- embedded in the FSA science team and working with policy and regulatory professionals across the FSA, the fellow will have access to internal systems, processes and data, gaining in-depth understanding of the policy process
- the opportunity to inform and influence the FSA and wider government policy on UPFs. This includes engagement with FSA Board, Chief Scientist, Executive and Science Council, with explainers and briefings being key outputs
- access to a wider network of policy, analysis, other experts, and opportunities to engage with government departments and aligned organisations
- knowledge exchange opportunities, including policy and cross-government activities and networks. Representing the FSA at external technical meetings will be encouraged, as will supporting the FSA's outward communications on UPFs, providing technical input to support advice to consumers and other stakeholders

## 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 food-related science and research
- subject matter expertise in dietary health, public health and/or food toxicology
- strong analytical skills including the ability to synthesise a range of quantitative and qualitative data 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:

- the ability to take a systems-based approach to assimilate research from across different disciplines

## 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 [Host's 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.