

UKRI policy fellowships 2026

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

MHCLG local government oversight and improvement fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

[Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#)

Host team:

The fellow will be hosted by either the Local Government Stewardship and Interventions, Local Audit Reform, Local Government Capacity and Improvement, or Local Government Accountability and Outcomes divisions, depending on interest and expertise. The four divisions represent two directorates in the Local Government, Growth and Communities group. The fellow will work across the divisions and with the Chief Construction and Scientific Adviser's Office at MHCLG.

Academic discipline/s:

Government and political science, public policy and management, public administration, finance and accounting and human geography

Summary:

Opportunity to work at the centre of government on one of the most significant and under-examined challenges in UK public administration; how the state oversees, supports and intervenes in local government, while providing expert advice that informs strategic thinking and policy development on strengthening local government oversight, improvement and system resilience.

Policy topic:

The government is strengthening the local government oversight and improvement regime, including by evolving the Best Value system, reforming local public audit, reviewing its approach to improvement support and enhancing scrutiny and assurance. Given the history of different oversight and improvement regimes and current constraints, including financial, this is a complex policy challenge that requires problem solving across policymakers, local practitioners and academic experts.

The work contributes to government priorities on improving living standards, increasing pride in place and breaking down barriers to opportunity, and to one of MHCLG's seven priorities, i.e. strengthening local government.

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:

MHCLG has offices throughout the UK: London, Belfast, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Darlington, Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham and Wolverhampton. Placements can be based in any MHCLG office. We anticipate that the fellowship could be undertaken effectively with remote working and occasional visits to a MHCLG office (as appropriate) to meet colleagues.

Hybrid working:

The fellow should generally aim to align with MHCLG's standard working arrangements for office attendance where feasible. These are currently 40-50% depending on location. There is flexibility for the fellow and host to agree alternative arrangements, depending on the nature of the work being undertaken, location and individual circumstances. Occasional visits to London may be required where an outside London location is agreed. Eligible travel and subsistence costs are supported by the main UKRI grant.

Security clearance and nationality eligibility criteria:

The fellow will require Basic Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) clearance before commencing the inception phase of their fellowship; this takes approximately a week to process. Whilst completing the fellowship is not conditional on Counter Terrorist Check (CTC) security clearance, the fellow will not be able to work in MHCLG's London Office regularly or without an escort without completed CTC security clearance. If it is expected that they will be working in MHCLG's London Office regularly, CTC security clearance will commence at the earliest opportunity. The following sites give information on the requirements and processes for checks. Please review the [National security vetting: clearance levels guidance](#) document and [Civil Service recruitment: nationality rules](#) guidance for further information.

Fellowship position description

Local authorities are central to delivering the government's missions of driving local economic growth and providing local public services that reduce health and wealth inequalities. The sector's resilience is under pressure for several reasons, including financial constraints, historic changes to the audit system and a more hands-off improvement support approach in previous years. Therefore, the government is strengthening local government oversight and improvement, including by evolving the Best Value system, reforming local public audit, reviewing its approach to improvement support and enhancing scrutiny and assurance. Strengthening local government oversight and improvement will benefit from collaboration between policy professionals, local practitioners and academic experts.

We seek a policy fellow who can contribute to emerging strategy and policy development on local government oversight and improvement policy and practice. Broadly, the fellow will provide expert advice, deliver projects and work with policy teams to help formulate local government strategy and policy. The fellow will also improve our connections with local government researchers and academic institutions.

The fellowship details will be co-designed by the fellow, MHCLG senior leadership and the Chief Construction and Scientific Adviser's (CCSA) Office reflecting both departmental priorities and the fellow's expertise. Research questions will also be agreed collaboratively, but examples include:

- how can central government balance assurance, intervention and local autonomy

- how can different oversight tools (Best Value, audit, improvement support, scrutiny and inspection) interact as a system
- what should an effective performance management and improvement support regime for local government involve
- how can an oversight and improvement system be created that prioritises and operationalises prevention
- what pathways lead to Best Value failure and where are the opportunities to change course
- how can efficient and effective local public audit be delivered
- how can efficient and effective scrutiny systems be put in place across public services

Given the fast-moving nature of the policy environment, we anticipate that fellowship activities and deliverables will be co-agreed on a rolling basis (e.g. every three months) with the fellow and MHCLG senior leadership. Activities will be co-produced with policymakers and could include:

- providing expert advice on priority policy problems
- producing evidence summaries, reviews and analysis
- preparing policy papers and briefings that translate research for non-specialist audiences
- convening policy workshops to bring academic challenge and rigour to policy development
- identifying research gaps and opportunities for future research
- enhancing capacity and capabilities in policy teams, and improving connections and knowledge sharing with universities
- supporting wider learning across the local government sector by connecting policy development to practitioner communities and academic debate

As a result, fellowship outputs may include policy-facing evidence summaries, policy papers and briefings for senior policy audiences, insights from policy workshops, and greater clarity on future research opportunities. The fellowship may also result in stronger policy capability in evidence use and improved links with academic and practitioner communities. We will support academic publication arising from fellowship activities, subject to relevance, sensitivities and departmental clearance processes.

The fellow will be embedded within a policy division in the Local Government, Growth and Communities Group, aligned to their interests and expertise, and will collaborate across divisions involved in oversight and improvement and the CCSA's Office.

The fellow will benefit from gaining insight into senior-level central government decision-making, opportunities to help shape significant reforms affecting local government across England, access to policy, analytical and scientific networks across government, including at Senior Civil Service level, and experience producing policy-relevant outputs alongside rigorous academic work.

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:

- academic research expertise, relative to career stage, in the Social Sciences with specialism in local government
- experience of applying academic research to address public policy problems

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:

- subject expertise in one or more of the following: local government oversight and improvement, Best Value, audit, accountability, performance management, improvement support, and governance and scrutiny

- experience communicating complex research ideas to non-specialist audiences
- experience working with and influencing diverse stakeholders, such as policymakers, analysts and non-specialists

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.