

UKRI policy fellowships 2026

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

DAERA land use and net zero fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

[Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

Host team:

Land Use and Land Use Change (LULUC) Branch brings together LULUCF related policy areas to deliver a reduction in carbon emissions and increased sequestration, with the aim of supporting Northern Ireland to meet the requirements of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 including meeting carbon budgets and developing the required Climate Action Plans.

Academic discipline/s:

Behaviour science, climate science, environmental & ecology science, environmental economics, soil & agricultural science

Summary:

Opportunity to build a robust evidence base on Land Use and Net Zero in Northern Ireland to inform policies and strategies, including climate action plans, LULUCF Forward Plan and a future Land Use Framework, to deliver reduced emissions and increased sequestration achieve NI's net zero climate target.

Policy topic:

Land use and Net Zero in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland faces a fundamental policy challenge in aligning land use with its Net Zero targets, with competing demands across agriculture, forestry, peatlands, energy and development creating uncertainty over how land can best contribute to emissions reduction and carbon sequestration. The fellow will help inform how land use policy can be better integrated and guided by robust evidence, supporting the development of a coherent, cross-sector approach that enables effective delivery of Net Zero outcomes.

Land use and Net Zero in Northern Ireland cuts across a range of departments and sectors in Northern Ireland.

Programme for Government commitments that relate to Land Use and Net Zero:

- grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy
- protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment

Government Mission: Planet

Before you start your application, please read the [Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2024-2027](#)

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:

Role can be based anywhere in the UK but will require travel to Northern Ireland office in Belfast during the course of the fellowship.

Hybrid working:

As this post can be based anywhere in the UK, there is no minimum requirement for office attendance.

It is anticipated that the majority of interaction between the fellow and LULUC Branch will be via online meetings and email correspondence but the fellow will need to budget for travel and subsistence for project visits to Northern Ireland six times during the fellowship. Below is a proposed outline of in-person visits to Northern Ireland:

- Inception phase – 1 visit (2-3 working days)
- Main phase – 4 visits (quarterly, visit lasting 3-4 working days)
- Knowledge exchange – 1 visit (2-3 working days)

This will be subject to agreement with the fellow during the inception phase.

A laptop will be provided enabling work from home and other sites, providing access to host systems. 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 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

Fellowship position description

Overview and policy challenge:

Northern Ireland faces a fundamental policy challenge in aligning land use with its Net Zero targets, with competing demands across agriculture, forestry, peatlands, energy and development creating uncertainty over how land can best contribute to emissions reduction and carbon sequestration, while also supporting food production and biodiversity outcomes.

The fellow will work within DAERA's LULUC team and across stakeholders to strengthen the evidence base and inform how land use policy can be better integrated, supporting a coherent, cross-sector approach to enabling land use changes that deliver multiple benefits for climate, food production and nature, and improve delivery of Net Zero outcomes.

Land Use and Net Zero cuts across multiple policy domains. There are numerous policy challenges including:

- finite land and competing policy demands
- uncertainty in the GHG Inventory
- short-term policy targets and long-term carbon outcomes
- alignment between inventory reporting and policy delivery
- enhancing spatial activity data
- just transition considerations

The fellowship will:

- produce findings that will support the evolution of key policy frameworks, including Climate Action Plans, the LULUCF Forward Plan and a future Land Use Framework, ensuring they are underpinned by robust, up-to-date evidence
- generate evidence to support Ministers and senior officials in making informed decisions on land use priorities, trade-offs and policy interventions
- outputs will provide practical insights to guide policy design, investment decisions and delivery approaches across land use sectors
- engage with cross-sector stakeholders ensuring outputs are relevant, usable and capable of informing real-world policy and delivery decisions
- provide a stronger analytical foundation for managing trade-offs and delivering balanced outcomes for climate, food production and biodiversity
- generate actionable evidence to inform policy decisions, shape key land use strategies, and support delivery of Net Zero through more integrated, evidence-led approaches

Co-design and collaboration:

Exact topics will be determined by host priorities during the inception phase, shaped by the fellow's interests and input. Below are some possible topics that could be explored:

- quantifying how different land use pathways (e.g. peatland restoration, afforestation, energy crops, agricultural change) could collectively deliver Net Zero within Northern Ireland's finite land area, and identifying unavoidable trade-offs
- embedding natural capital accounting into land use decisions to support Net Zero while maximising wider ecosystem benefits
- understanding who gains and who loses from land use change for Net Zero, and how impacts can be managed fairly
- examining how land use governance structures can better support Net Zero delivery across sectors and scales
- strengthening LULUCF Activity Data and Emissions Factors for the Northern Ireland GHG Inventory

Indicative outputs:

- scoping reports that overview policy, governance and scientific gaps
- stakeholder and data landscape mapping, identifying key players, their roles and data flows
- policy briefs on high level findings to inform stakeholders of key issues
- academic publications and knowledge exchange activities related to the fellowship, as agreed with the LULUC team and other government stakeholders

Fellow benefits:

Fellow benefits include:

- direct policy influence - opportunity to contribute evidence that directly informs policy development and decision-making within DAERA, including Climate Action Plans, the LULUCF Forward Plan and a future Land Use Framework, with clear pathways to influence Ministerial and senior official decisions on land use priorities and trade-offs
- embedded in policy delivery - working within DAERA's LULUC team, the fellow will gain first-hand experience of how policy is developed, tested and implemented, with opportunities to shape live policy discussions and contribute to real-time decision-making processes
- cross-government engagement and visibility - regular engagement with other NI sectors and departments (e.g. agriculture, environment, energy and planning functions), as well as external stakeholders, providing insight into cross-government working and the opportunity to influence a wide policy and delivery landscape
- high-impact, tangible outputs - opportunity to design and deliver outputs with clear policy application, including policy briefs, evidence syntheses, data and stakeholder mapping, and analytical tools, with outputs actively used to inform policy design, prioritisation and implementation
- co-design and ownership of work programme - scope to shape the direction of the fellowship through co-design with DAERA, aligning research interests with priority policy questions to maximise relevance and impact
- publication and profile-building - opportunities to produce publishable research and policy-relevant outputs, contributing to academic and policy debates while ensuring findings are accessible and actionable for government audiences
- stakeholder engagement and knowledge exchange - participation in policy roundtables, cross-government workshops and stakeholder engagement processes, providing opportunities to test findings, build consensus and enhance the real-world applicability of outputs
- development of applied policy skills - experience in translating complex evidence into actionable policy insights, navigating uncertainty, and managing trade-offs across climate, food and biodiversity objectives
- exposure to complex, system-wide challenges - working at the intersection of land use, climate and Net Zero, the fellow will develop expertise in addressing multidimensional policy challenges within a constrained and highly scrutinised policy environment

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 a relevant field (e.g. land use, behaviour science, environmental science, ecology, geography, agricultural science, economics, forestry, climate policy)
- the ability to communicate complex information and analysis
- interdisciplinary experience (e.g. ability to integrate environmental, economic and social considerations in land-use analysis)

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:

- experience working in a Northern Ireland context
- subject matter expertise in Net Zero targets and pathways (e.g. familiar with climate legislation, carbon budgets, statutory targets)
- advanced or specialist technical experience relevant to Land Use and Net Zero (e.g. working with LULUCF GHG inventory methods, land use models, mitigation pathway analysis, spatial land-use analysis)

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.