



# UKRI policy fellowships 2026

## Fellowship position

### Fellowship title:

UKHSA social and behavioural science for health security fellowship

### Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

### Host organisation:

[UK Health Security Agency \(UKHSA\)](#)

### Host team:

Behavioural Science and Insights Unit, Science Strategy and Evidence Directorate, Chief Scientific Officer's Group

### Academic discipline/s:

Behavioural science, psychology, social science, public health, health protection.

### Summary:

Working with UKHSA's Behavioural Science and Insights Unit to integrate social and behavioural science evidence into health protection policy and incident response.

### Policy topic:

This Policy Fellowship fits within the Health / NHS Mission area, Fit for the Future

### 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 fellowship position will be offered as remote based with the option for attending offices more frequently if the fellowship student wishes to. There will be some travel required to our head office at 10 South Colonnade, Canary Wharf, London to attend team meetings/away days and to enable greater team working. The successful fellow will also be able to attend our offices in Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham, as desired.

## Hybrid working:

Whilst UKHSA has a three-days a week minimum office working requirement in line with the rest of the UK Civil Service, we would be content for a minimum one day a week office attendance in the main placement phase. A laptop will 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 London 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:

Please refer to the following links which provide guidance on the nationality criteria for the civil service [Civil Service recruitment: nationality rules - GOV.UK](#).

[Basic Personnel Security Standard \(BPSS\)](#) will be 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.

It may be beneficial for the fellow to have security clearance to work in the Behavioural Science and Insights Unit which could take up to 6 months, so this will be started at the earliest confirmation of the successful fellow. This will not impede on the start date of the fellow as long as they have secured BPSS, the fellow can undergo the security clearance whilst in their placement. For more information please visit the following link and read the applicant guidance [SC - Guidance Pack for Applicants - GOV.UK](#).

## Fellowship position description

The UKHSA is the nation's expert body for health security, responsible for preparing for, preventing and responding to infectious diseases and environmental hazards. As an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), UKHSA provides scientific and operational leadership to protect public health and enhance national preparedness. Social and behavioural science is essential to UKHSA because it can help explain and inform how people and communities understand risk and respond to guidance and advice, enabling more effective health protection policy, communications and incident response. The Behavioural Science and Insight Unit (BSIU) at the UKHSA plays a crucial role in applying behavioural and social science to enhance health protection and health security.

The fellow will work with the UKHSA's Behavioural Science and Insights Unit (BSIU) to support the integration of evidence from the social and behavioural sciences into health protection policy and incident response. The role will involve developing skills in rapid evidence synthesis, designing community engagement and rapid research to inform action in public health response, and translating and mobilising research outcomes into actionable insights for health protection practitioners and incident management. The exact topics the fellow will work on will be determined by host priorities during the inception phase, shaped by the fellow's interests and input. It is expected that in the lifetime of the fellowship, several regional or national health protection incidents will provide the opportunity for the fellow to collaborate with multidisciplinary teams across UKHSA and with cross-government partners to support evidence-based decision-making at pace. Should the demand from incidents not meet the expected volume during the fellowship, the fellow will have the opportunity to undertake original research within BSIU aligned with host priorities, shaped by the fellow's interest and input.

The fellow will add value by advancing the integration of social and behavioural science evidence into health protection policy and incident response, ensuring rapid decision-making is informed by evidence. Their work will contribute directly to improving UKHSA's readiness to use scientific advice in emergency response; by synthesising evidence rapidly, designing targeted community engagement strategies, and mobilising actionable insights. They will help to address barriers to adoption of social and behavioural science evidence, by exploring the needs of health protection practitioners and incident management teams during incident response, tailoring advice, and evaluating its impact. By applying their expertise during regional or national incidents, the fellow will help UKHSA develop innovative approaches to managing public health challenges at pace and scale.

The fellow will be part of the Chief Scientific Officer's Group in UKHSA, who have a track record in research publication, engagement with academia, engagement with policymakers and use of evidence to inform policy, practice, and guidance. The fellow will be fully embedded into a Division (BSIU) and will have the opportunity to interact with a wide range of experts within UKHSA and with our partner organisations. Crucially this will involve full exposure to the incident management arrangements of UKHSA, a health protection and health security-focused Category 1 responder.

Working within UKHSA, and with the BSIU specifically, will provide a range of benefits to the successful fellow. These include:

- experience working with world leading experts in social and behavioural science, health protection and public health, developing skills, knowledge and methodologies
- being embedded within the team (for example, the successful fellow will be supervised by an experienced researcher within the BSIU and will be invited to engage in team meetings and networks) to gain insight from the wealth of research conducted by team members
- opportunities to present to local and national teams within UKHSA, and cross-government and academic networks to foster collaborations and raise awareness of their research
- support provided from UKHSA to facilitate the publication of open access journal articles and support from experienced researchers to develop and publish outputs from research projects
- opportunities to work with policymakers to use their research and evidence to influence policy, practice and guidance
- opportunities to support subject matter experts from UKHSA's BSIU with responding to rapid turnaround queries or incident response in the fellow's field of research

The fellow will be provided with an Academic Honorary Contract with UKHSA, with a line manager in the organisation and an induction, equipment, email address and access to relevant systems will be organised. The fellow will have opportunities to work on site at any of the UKHSA locations including London – Canary Wharf, London - Colindale, Porton Down, Harwell, and regional offices across the country depending on the nature of the role and requirements.

## 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:

- relevant PhD and relevant post-doctoral experience or MSc and equivalent significant experience of working at a similar level in a relevant specialist area
- demonstrated potential in the application of behavioural and social science theories and methodologies to the design, development, implementation or evaluation of behavioural interventions
- experience or demonstrated potential in qualitative and quantitative research, desk-based literature research, abstracting, data or report analysis and report preparation in behavioural analysis and intervention design

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:

- an established track record of research and publication in the field of social and behavioural science applied to public health and/or health protection
- experience with coproduction methodologies and public involvement in research and intervention design
- experience working with stakeholders (public, policy, third sector, and beyond) to implement or evaluate behaviour change interventions in real world contexts

## 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 hosts 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.