



UK Research
and Innovation



Wales Centre for Public Policy
Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru

UKRI policy fellowships 2026

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Wales Centre for Public Policy assessing the impact of place-based knowledge mobilisation initiatives fellowship

Fellowship type:

What Works Innovation fellowship

Host organisation:

[Wales Centre for Public Policy](#)

Host team:

Research Team (Professor James Downe, Dr Hannah Durrant, Dr Paul Vallance, Dr Eleanor Mackillop)

Academic discipline/s:

Knowledge mobilisation, impact evaluation, public policy, regional studies

Summary:

Opportunity to evaluate place-based knowledge mobilisation initiatives, focussing on the different models in existence, and their impact on decision-making and capacity building at local and regional levels.

Policy topic:

Improving understanding of the impact of knowledge mobilisation initiatives on policy and practice at the local and regional level. These initiatives are one of the primary mechanisms that connect local and regional government to academic research to address areas of research interest (ARIs) and achieve government missions in place. The importance of effective knowledge mobilisation mechanisms has been recognised by recent funding awards (e.g. ESRC's Local Policy Innovation Partnerships (LPIPs)) to build and enhance the connective infrastructure between policy and research. In keeping with UK Government and UKRI commitment to metascience, this fellowship provides an opportunity to apply robust methods to assess the efficacy of the systems, processes and practices of place-base knowledge mobilisation to support improvement and enhance impact.

Research career stage:

Open to all career stages

Fellowship structure

The fellowship is estimated to begin in May 2027. 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:

This fellowship will be based at Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) at Cardiff University. We expect the research to be largely conducted remotely but it will involve some travel to Cardiff and case studies around the UK.

WCPP has previous experience of successfully hosting What Works Innovation fellows and will use the learning from this to fully embed them in the Centre. We plan for the fellow to be hosted within the Research Team in WCPP which is funded by Cardiff University and has a strong record of conducting research in this area and working collaboratively. The project will be co-designed between members of the Research Team and the fellow.

Hybrid working:

WCPP has a hybrid working policy with staff generally working two days a week in the office, although members of the Centre's research team (within which the fellow will be based) spend one day a week in Cardiff. The fellow's precise working pattern will be agreed during the inception phase considering their needs and circumstances (e.g., including travel time, caring responsibilities). We anticipate that they will work remotely for most of the time but there are benefits to spending time face-to-face in our offices so you can join in Centre activities such as team meetings, team development days, monthly journal reading club and social events. This will ensure that the fellow feels fully embedded in and supported by the WCPP team. In the inception phase, we expect the fellow to visit the WCPP offices at least three times to codesign the project. In the placement phase, they will conduct research in place-based knowledge mobilisation initiatives in different part of the UK, as well as spending time in WCPP discussing research design, findings and dissemination. 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:

There is no security clearance needed for WCPP.

Fellowship position description

The WCPP is seeking to recruit a fellow who will lead a project examining the approaches and impact of place-based knowledge mobilisation initiatives. The UK government, UKRI and other funders have made significant investments into place-based initiatives that aim to connect and leverage the research and innovation ecosystem to advance the application of knowledge to achieve Government missions and address regional/place-based Areas of Research Interest. The fellow will examine the impact of these initiatives including What Works Centres (WWCs) (Vallance et al, 2025) and University-based local policy focused organisations (Durrant and Mackillop, 2022) in creating meaningful context-specific change. These investments have developed different approaches to mobilising knowledge and influencing place-based decision-makers, but the nature and scale of their impacts are largely unknown, nor which factors help to determine change.

We will work with the fellow to design a research project to explore this topic based on their expertise and interests. Our outline approach suggests four possible stages:

1. A review of the existing literature (including both academic and grey literature) on place-based knowledge mobilisation initiatives. The fellow will be able to codesign the project using the results

from this review. This review will start in the inception phase to inform the direction of the case study research in the main placement phase.

2. We anticipate the project will involve conducting a mapping of place-based knowledge mobilisation initiatives in the UK (e.g. some What Works Centres, Insights North East, Y-PERN (Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network), London Research & Policy Partnership (LRaPP), and LPIPs) as well as understanding bodies that have recently disbanded. This stage will build on previous research (Renberg-Fawcett and Durrant, 2024) and provide clarity on what is a complex and constantly changing landscape. We will also examine international examples where these can inform the project. The fellow will start to categorise the different practices used, the policy focus, the type of local governance context they are operating in (e.g. devolved administrations, combined authority), and any other factors they identify as potentially shaping impact. The findings will be shared with interested stakeholders such as the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN).
3. Based on the literature review and desk-based mapping, we will work with the fellow to codesign the research conducted during the main placement phase. We anticipate this will focus on a few deep-dive case studies exploring different place-based contexts and devolved governance arrangements. We suggest interviewing a range of staff across different levels of the organisation and stakeholders to surface best practice, examples of impact, and lessons on how place-based initiatives can have a positive impact on policy and practice at a sub-national level.
4. The dissemination phase of the research will be important as the findings have the potential to make an important contribution to academic research, practice (for both What Works Centres and other knowledge brokering organisations), funders (such as ESRC and UKRI) and others in the evidence eco-system. Outputs from the fellowship should be tailored to different audiences and focus on different aspects of the findings – e.g., drawing out specific recommendations for policy and practice in short policy briefings, and conducting a comparison of initiatives to examine the importance of context in an academic output. The knowledge exchange phase will also include events involving key stakeholders to share learning from the fellowship.

We have excellent links to many place-based knowledge mobilisation organisations and WCPP is a member of the What Works Network and UPEN. This means that the fellow will be able to ‘hit the ground running’. We have consulted with existing bodies to ensure that the outline plan for the fellowship is useful to improve practice and not duplicative of any existing research. We look forward to working with the successful candidate to co-design a project that is most likely to be impactful.

Expected outcomes:

The fellow will apply their knowledge and analytical skills to a significant topic in the field of knowledge mobilisation. They will analyse a range of different organisations to examine the key factors which help to determine impact. The fellow will produce outputs that could include a report, briefing paper, blog and academic article.

Benefits to the fellow:

- experience of collaborating with researchers in a WWC to conduct research on a highly salient topic
- opportunity to work with academics in WCPP to publish an academic output from the fellowship
- the centre has a very supportive research culture where work in progress can be discussed with colleagues on a regular basis
- developing their research, impact, and dissemination skills in a real-world environment
- opportunity to influence how place-based organisations understand and measure their impact
- building a network of contacts in WWCs, universities, policy and practice and those working on impact across place-based institutions in the UK

Person specification

Essential criteria:

Applications will be assessed by UKRI panel assessment against the following essential opportunity-specific requirements in addition to the generic eligibility and call criteria.

- an established expertise and proven portfolio of research, publications or relevant professional experience within at least two of the following research fields: Impact of research and evidence on policy and practice (and evaluation of impact); public policy research (especially evidence-informed policymaking); qualitative research methods (e.g., interviews); knowledge mobilisation
- experience of managing research with multiple strands of activity, competing deadlines and finite resources
- experience of reviewing academic and grey knowledge and drawing out key findings in an easily accessible format (such as lay summaries, briefing papers)

Applicants shortlisted from the panel assessment will be assessed at the host led interview selection process against the following desirable opportunity-specific requirements.

Desirable criteria:

- proven ability to demonstrate creativity, innovation and leadership in understanding how to assess impact
- experience of working in research or policy related to evaluation or impact
- experience of drawing insights from research findings and writing them up for decision-makers

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.