



# UKRI policy fellowships 2026

## Fellowship position

### Fellowship title:

DfE understanding pupil-level factors and the rate of suspensions in primary and secondary schools in England fellowship

### Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

### Host organisation:

[Department for Education](#)

### Host team:

Behaviour, Exclusion Analysis & Research Team, Schools Group

### Academic discipline/s:

Behavioural science, psychology, economics, education, statistics

### Summary:

Opportunity to build robust evidence base on the factors associated with pupils being suspended and excluded from schools in England, helping to inform strategies and policies at local and national levels to improve pupil educational engagement and encourage educational success.

### Policy topic:

The Opportunity Mission: [Every child achieving and thriving \(HTML version\) - GOV.UK](#)

### 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:

We are a cross-site team. The role can be based in any of the DfE offices where the unit are based: London, Sheffield, Manchester, or Darlington. There may be some requirement to travel to meet other team members, this would be approximately four times within a year.

## Hybrid working:

Whilst DfE currently has a three-days a week minimum office working requirement, we would be content for a minimum one day a week office attendance, at any location listed above, during 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 from main placement site to other sites 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:

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 may be able to 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

Due to timings of this opportunity and policy development we are keen to work with the fellow to jointly set and agree a detailed project plan during the inception phase. This will enable us to capture the current policy thinking alongside the latest evidence and the expertise of the fellow.

Suspensions (where a pupil is taken out of lessons due to serious poor behaviour) and exclusions (where pupils are taken out of the school on a permanent basis) are serious sanctions for schools to impose on children, often in the most serious circumstances.

Over the last decade, rates of suspensions and exclusions have risen sharply, particularly since the pandemic. The 23/24 academic year, (most recent data available) saw the highest levels of suspensions and exclusions ever recorded since data collection began in 2006/07. However, for children to be able to achieve and thrive, they need to be actively engaged in education in school and minimising lost learning time. The recent [Schools White Paper](#) clearly set out departmental intentions to hold a public consultation, update guidance and introduce a duty that schools must set work for excluded children to mitigate the effects of lost learning while managing teacher capacity.

We envisage that the fellow will carry out research and analysis to help us identify the factors (pupil, school, family or wider) that are associated with increased rates of suspension and exclusions. As this a developing area of keen ministerial interest, the exact scope will be agreed as part of the inception phase.

Our current key areas of interest are:

- updating the evidence that was used to inform the 2019, [Timpson Review of school exclusions](#), in particular, the data in the [Technical Note](#).
- identifying the driving factors behind the increase in suspensions and exclusions, with view to developing supportive strategies to improve educational engagement of those at risk of suspension and exclusion, therefore reducing future lost learning.

We would like the fellow to look beyond the statistics, capturing high-quality qualitative based insights into pupil suspensions and exclusions and the effects of them on children, schools and families. This is likely to involve some primary research which the team would support.

Benefits to the fellow of the opportunity:

- opportunity to codesign, produce and publish original research and analysis, ensuring that findings contribute to national policy discussions while adhering to necessary security protocols
- being embedded in the DfE team, with access to internal systems and processes, gaining in-depth understanding of the policy process
- the opportunity to inform and influence DfE and wider government policy
- access to datasets related to education, suspensions and exclusions including the National Pupil Database, School Census and the daily attendance data which includes information about exclusions
- access to a wider network of policy, analysis, other experts and opportunities to engage with government departments and aligned organisations
- potential knowledge exchange opportunities, including policy roundtables, cross-government workshops and wider networks

We are keen to work with the successful fellow to shape the final project, ensuring it is aligned to both departmental needs and the fellow's interests/skill sets.

## 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 education research or data science
- subject matter expertise in understanding behaviour in schools, particularly around suspensions and exclusions
- strong quantitative and qualitative analytical skills relating to this opportunity (for example, the ability to conduct high quality analyses with large national datasets, ability to design and conduct mixed methods research, synthesise a range of quantitative and qualitative data using statistical and data science methods and interpret findings relevant to a non-technical audience)

Applicants shortlisted from the panel assessment will be invited to a DfE led interview. At this stage DfE will also consider the following desirable fellowship-specific requirements.

### Desirable criteria:

- experience in conducting policy-relevant analysis into pupil suspensions or exclusions

## 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.