UK Research and Innovation

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

DCMS Digital identity inclusion fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

Host team:

Office for Digital Identities and Attributes

Academic discipline/s:

Social Economics, Public administration

Summary:

An opportunity to identify the barriers to individuals wanting to use digital verification services and support policy making on the role of government and industry in improving accessibility and inclusion for these services.

Policy topic:

Trusted digital verification services (DVS) are essential to a modern digital economy, supporting the Government's Economic Growth Mission by enabling secure, inclusive, and accessible digital identities that make every day online interactions and transactions simpler and more trustworthy.

Research career stage:

Open to early and mid-career researchers

Fellowship structure

The fellowship is scheduled to begin on 1 October 2027 subject to 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 role can be based in Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Darlington, Edinburgh, London, Salford. There will be some requirement to travel to meet other team members, this would be approximately four times within a year.

Hybrid working:

During the inception phase when the fellow is based with their home institution, the fellow will work remotely. During the main placement phase, a hybrid office/home based working model where staff will spend a norm of 40-60% of their time in the office (minimum of 40%) over a month with flex dependent on balancing business and individual need.

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. The civil service also has nationality requirements that candidates would need to meet in order to take up the post. Please see civil service recruitment nationality rules for further information. Candidates should check these requirements before applying to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria.

Fellowship position description

The Office for Digital Identities and Attributes (OfDIA) enables the use of trusted digital verification services across the UK, allowing people to prove their identity or personal attributes securely without relying on physical documents.

OfDIA does not provide digital identity services itself. Instead, it sets and maintains the rules – the trust framework - that providers can choose to be independently certified against through the UK digital verification services trust framework. This is an interesting and rapidly evolving policy area. The market already carries out millions of checks each year and contributes more than £1 billion to the UK economy.

A key objective for OfDIA is to support an inclusive digital verification market. Identity exclusion remains a persistent issue, with around 1 in 10 eligible voters lacking a valid photo ID. This can limit people's ability to access essential services and opportunities, including right to work, right to rent, DBS checks, banking services and age-restricted products.

The issues affecting the ID-excluded are complex and multi-faceted, intersecting a broad range of aspects of marginalisation. This is an opportunity to collaborate and co-design a project aiming to understand the problem and the policy options to address the issue. We envisage the fellow will carry out a research project in the following areas of interest, with the scope to be agreed as part of the inception phase:

- understanding identity exclusion: examine who is excluded from digital verification services, why they face barriers, and how exclusion affects access to services such as employment, housing, financial services and age-restricted goods
- improving inclusion while maintaining trust: explore how government and industry can reduce identity exclusion through digital verification services while preserving security, fraud protection and trust
- learning from international approaches: review how other countries address identity exclusion, identifying good practice and lessons that could be applied in the UK
- measuring inclusion outcomes: develop approaches for monitoring and evaluating whether digital verification services are becoming more accessible and inclusive over time

The fellow will have the opportunity to design, produce and publish original research and will have access to a wider network of policy, analysis, other experts and opportunities to engage with government departments and aligned organisations.

The fellow will be embedded in the Children, Inclusion Fraud and Security policy team, with a DCMS email address and IT access. They will be supported by a line manager, who would meet for regular check-ins to ensure the impact of the fellowship is maximised for the fellow and the Department.

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:

- strong analytical skills relating to the opportunity, for example, the ability to synthesise a range of qualitative data
- ability to synthesise complex evidence from multiple sources and translate findings into clear, actionable recommendations
- experience in communicating complex analytical findings to diverse stakeholders through high-impact research, workshops, or strategic policy briefings

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 matter expertise in specific topics related to the fellowship, such as digital inclusion or digital identity
- demonstrable experience of evaluating policy interventions

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 DCMS' 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.