UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

DWP trust in services, including digital services and those using artificial intelligence fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Host team:

The fellow will be working as part of our Business Strategy Analysis Division (BSA).

Academic discipline/s:

Qualitative research, survey analysis, behavioural science

Summary:

The aim of the fellowship is to understand the drivers of trust in DWP services, with a particular focus on those that are digitalised and supported by artificial intelligence.

Policy topic:

To inform continuing efforts to embrace technologies across public services and improving citizen's experience. Relates to DWP's Areas of Research Interest (ARI) objective to deliver high quality, efficient services, ensuring that people are treated with dignity and respect, as well as the wider Government objective of "Rewiring the State".

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:

We anticipate that the Fellowship can be undertaken effectively with remote working and visits to DWP offices (as appropriate) to meet colleagues/teams. The successful applicant could base themselves in or make use of office space in London (Westminster), Sheffield, Leeds, Newcastle, Manchester or Glasgow where colleagues and project stakeholders will be present. Eligible travel and subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details.

Hybrid working:

We would expect the successful applicant to combine time working in one of DWP's sites, to benefit from face-to-face interaction with colleagues, with some remote working, as is the case for most DWP employees. The usual expectation for DWP employees is to spend 60% of their time in the office, but the precise arrangements will be negotiated with the successful applicant. During the inception phase we would expect to have around six in person meetings at an appropriate DWP site. 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:

Baseline Personnel Security Standard is required (expected to take up 4-6 weeks from submission). 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 ESRC. However, some of the inception phase engagement with the Team can commence whilst awaiting clearance but will be required for the main placement phase. Please see national security vetting: clearance levels for further information.

Fellowship position description

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is seeking a Policy Fellowship focused on understanding the relationship between trust and the design, delivery and use of public services, with a particular emphasis on digital and AI-enabled services.

Trust is a critical enabler of DWP's modernisation ambitions, supporting better outcomes for both the Department's 20 million customers and for the Department. DWP has an established evidence base on the factors that drive trust in its services, highlighting the importance of getting things right, making services easy to use, communicating clearly, and providing a professional and supportive experience. As DWP continues to transform services through digital technology and emerging AI capabilities, there is a need to better understand how trust is established and maintained in digital and AI-enabled services, and how this influences customer confidence, engagement and behaviour.

This fellowship offers the opportunity to undertake original research and analysis in a highly relevant policy area, contributing directly to DWP's evidence base and future service design.

Research Areas

We envisage the fellow carrying out a research project in one of several areas of interest, with the precise scope agreed during the inception phase and shaped by the fellow's expertise and interests. Potential areas include:

- understanding how trust is established, maintained and challenged in digital and ai-enabled public services
- exploring how the design and operation of digital and ai-enabled services influence trust, confidence and service engagement
- examining the relationship between trust, transparency, fairness and accountability in digital public services

- investigating how trust influences customer behaviours, including engagement with services, reporting of changes in circumstances, take-up of support, and willingness to interact with ai-enabled systems
- identifying how trust can support the successful adoption of service modernisation initiatives and emerging technologies
- understanding how trust in digital and ai-enabled services varies across different customer groups and service channels
- the fellowship is intended to be collaborative and flexible. exact research questions, methods and outputs will be co-designed between the fellow and DWP during the early stages of the placement

Data, Collaboration and Engagement

The fellow will be embedded within DWP and work closely with policy, operational and analytical colleagues. They will have access to a range of evidence sources and opportunities for cross government collaboration, including:

- publicly available datasets and literature
- DWP's existing evidence base on customer trust, experience and service delivery, alongside in-house survey, administrative and other relevant data sources available during the fellowship
- opportunities to undertake qualitative research with DWP customers, likely through major transformation programmes such as service modernisation and health transformation
- access to wider networks across government, academia and research organisations with shared interests in trust, digital government and AI
- knowledge exchange through engagement with other government departments undertaking related work
- academic experts and external research communities, cross-government workshops, policy roundtables and analytical networks

Benefits to the Fellow

The fellow will have the opportunity to:

- co-design, produce and publish original research that contributes to both policy and wider academic discussions, subject to relevant governance and security requirements
- be embedded within DWP, gaining direct insight into policy development, service delivery and government decision-making
- inform and influence policy and service transformation in one of the UK's largest public service organisations
- access unique datasets and evidence sources relating to customer experiences, service delivery and organisational change
- build networks across government, academia and the wider research community
- contribute to an important and emerging evidence agenda at the intersection of public trust, digital transformation and artificial intelligence

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:

- demonstrable expertise in qualitative research methods, including the design, delivery and analysis of research with service users, citizens or other relevant populations
- experience synthesising evidence from multiple sources, including qualitative and quantitative data, to generate actionable insights for policy, service design or decision-making
- a passion for public service excellence and keen interest in ai adoption

Desirable criteria:

- ability to conduct quantitative analysis
- a research track record relating to trust, public attitudes, digital services, artificial intelligence, public service delivery, or closely related fields
- a network from which to draw from regarding the above

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 DWP's 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.