UK Research and Innovation

Department for Work & Pensions

UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

DWP understanding labour force participation behaviour fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Host team:

Work and Health Analysis Division in the Joint Work and Health Directorate

Academic discipline/s:

Behavioural science, economics

Summary:

What influences people's behaviours for seeking work, entering work, remaining in work and exiting work, particularly those reporting a health condition or disability, and how can this understanding inform the development of more effective employment and welfare support in order to help people engage with the labour market and be prevented from leaving it?

Policy topic:

Work and health, Kickstarting Economic Growth mission. There is broad recognition that Britain is facing labour market challenges. Over one in five working-age adults are out of the workforce, substantially because of health problems. Mental ill-health among young people is rising sharply. Older workers are leaving too early. Disabled people remain locked out of work at twice the rate of non-disabled people.

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 the Work and Health Analysis division (WoHAD) analysts are all 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, either in Sheffield or London. 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

We want to understand the importance and interactions of the various factors which influence individuals' behaviour in seeking to enter or remain in work – including;

- financial incentives
- health and disability
- beliefs and attitudes
- job quality
- family factors and more.

The work will bring together insights from quantitative analysis of both widely available survey data (such as Understanding Society) and the extensive (and increasingly available) administrative data, with other more qualitative research to get deep insight into behaviours.

There is a good deal of evidence on associations between a wide range of factors - such as financial incentives, family circumstances, health/disability - and employment, but this is varied in nature (some quantitative, some more qualitative), often describes correlation rather than giving causal insights, and gives very limited insight into interactions – for example, why some people may respond more to financial incentives than others.

We expect the fellow to help us to develop a more integrated understanding, which in turn will help us to develop more effective policies, which take into account peoples' varying drivers of behaviour to produce

lasting change. The fellow will be part of our Work and Health Analysis Division, although also working closely with our Universal Credit Analysis Division, with a DWP email address and access to the data held by DWP and fully involved in the work of the Division. They will have a designated line manager who will be directly involved in the project and will work closely with DWP analysts working on related tasks.

The fellow will have the opportunity to;

- codesign, produce and publish original research, ensuring that findings contribute to wider scientific and policy discussions while adhering to necessary security protocols
- be embedded in the (host) team and have access to internal systems and processes, gaining in-depth understanding of the policy process
- inform and influence (host) and wider government policy on important labour market issues
- access datasets related to benefits and employment
- access a wider network of policy, analysis, other experts and opportunities to engage with government departments and aligned organisations
- knowledge exchange opportunities, including policy roundtables, cross-government workshops and wider networks
- build on the existing evidence landscape, including current ESRC and NIHR-funded research on economic inactivity, health, disability, and caring responsibilities with distinct and complementary research

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 a relevant discipline (employment studies, health/labour market economics, public health, population health, etc.)
- data analysis skills including with large survey datasets e.g., regressions, survival analysis
- access (or skills / ability to access and engage) academic networks of relevance to work with policy colleagues

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:

- practical application and familiarity with evidence synthesis e.g., systematic review, rapid evidence assessment, meta-analysis, realist synthesis
- ability to manage others' work and support their development and capability
- experience of working with key longitudinal datasets e.g. Understanding Society

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.