UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Department for Education AI fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

Department for Education

Host team:

Science Unit

Academic discipline/s:

Artificial Intelligence (AI), education technology, machine learning, cognitive science, science of learning

Summary:

Opportunity to advise the Department for Education (DfE) on AI-enabled education technology and broader issues relating to AI.

Policy topic:

The fellowship will provide the Department for Education with high-quality, policy-ready evidence to support decisions on policy relating to education technologies and broader AI issues.

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 at any of the Department for Education's offices: Bristol, Cambridge, Coventry, Darlington, London, Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield. The Chief Scientific Adviser, to whom the Fellow will primarily be working, is based in London; there are currently Science Unit colleagues in London, Bristol and Manchester. There is likely to be some requirement to travel to meet team members at other DfE offices, this would be approximately four times within a year.

Hybrid working:

Whilst the DfE has a 60% minimum office working requirement in line with the rest of the UK Civil Service, we can offer some flexibility on this depending on individual circumstances. Please be aware that this role can only be worked in the UK and not from overseas.

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 to London 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 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

This position offers the opportunity to work directly with the Chief Scientific Adviser to provide insight and answers to questions from the department on matters relating to AI. The Department is concerned with how technology can be used to support student learning and not undermine it (for example through cognitive offloading), the role of technology in supporting teacher productivity without undermining professional agency, the contrast between the technology available to children and young people in schools versus the home, and future directions of technology development for which the education sector may need to prepare. Therefore, in this role the fellow will analyse emerging AI and education technologies to inform the Department's understanding of their functionality, development, and real-world use, drawing on international examples to assess effectiveness, pedagogical integration, and future potential. They will also help the department to understand AI use by children and young people beyond EdTech, and will perform a horizon-scanning function to ensure the department is on the front-foot.

The details of the work will be determined by host priorities during the inception phase, shaped by the fellow's interests and input. Depending on the fellow's interests, the role could involve the opportunity to undertake original research and analysis for both internal and external publications, subject to any relevant clearance and data requirements. This might include systematic reviews or analyses of DfE held datasets. Work will be co-designed with the Chief Scientific Adviser, reflecting the policy priorities of the Department but shaped by the interests of the fellow.

The fellow will be fully integrated as a member of the Science Unit, with a dedicated line manager. They will also be a member of the Department's wider analytical community, providing opportunities for knowledge sharing and networking. They will be included in any broader meetings relevant for their work, and we will facilitate links to relevant policy colleagues as well as other government departments and organisations.

We will provide a DfE laptop with a DfE e-mail address, and access to DfE data as required. They would be welcome to work in the DfE office most convenient for them.

This position will provide the opportunity to inform and influence DfE and wider government policy on AI issues relating to children and young people, and to gain an in-depth understanding of the policy process.

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:

- knowledge about operation of contemporary machine learning and AI systems, especially as related to LLMs and analytical tools
- familiarity with education technology products, especially those based on gen AI, and/or previous approaches to creating 'cognitive tutors'

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:

- experience in educational environments
- experience with technology companies
- understanding of likely future directions of technology products

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 DfE'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.