UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Environment Agency governance of urban nature-based solutions fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

Environment Agency (EA)

Host team:

Climate Adaptation and Resilience research theme within the Chief Scientist's Group

Academic discipline/s:

Geography, environmental science, urban planning, political science, sociology

Summary:

Opportunity to better understand how governance, planning and investment decisions can affect the equitable scaling of urban nature-based solutions, helping cities become more resilient to climate-related hazards while supporting sustainable growth and nature recovery.

Policy topic:

This fellowship will address the challenge of scaling urban nature-based solutions in densely developed places, exploring how governance and decision-making influence their implementation and benefits, supporting the Environment Agency's EA2030 ambitions and the Government's Strong Foundations mission.

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 fellow will join a national team working across multiple locations, including Wallingford, Bristol, London, Newcastle and Manchester. The team primarily meets online twice a week, with quarterly in-person meetings, at different locations. The fellow will be welcome to work in an Environment Agency (EA) or Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Group office local to them and to attend quarterly in-person team meetings.

Hybrid working:

Hybrid working is available for both the inception and placement phase. The fellow would not be required to work in an EA/ Defra Office if home working most of the time is preferred. Opportunities are available for more regular in-person collaboration with members of the Climate Adaptation and Resilience research theme, should the fellow wish to do so. Working from an EA office may also provide valuable opportunities to build relationships and gain a broader understanding of the organisation. Eligible travel and subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details.

To support their day-to-day work, the fellow will be provided with full access to the EA's IT systems, in the same way we onboard seconded contractors. They will receive an EA email address, laptop, Office365 access, and will be added to all relevant mailing lists, internal webinars, MS Teams channels and programme communications so they can stay fully connected with the team's activities.

Security clearance and nationality eligibility criteria:

Basic Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) checks and, if London based, Counter Terrorism Check (CTC). We would ask the person taking up this fellowship opportunity to start the security clearance application process as soon as their fellowship has been confirmed as security checks can take 3-4 weeks to complete. The inception phase may begin whilst clearance is underway but must be complete before the 12-month placement phase can begin. Please see national security vetting: clearance levels for further information.

Fellowship position description

This fellowship will deliver new interdisciplinary evidence on how nature-based solutions (NbS) can be scaled and embedded across densely developed urban environments to enhance resilience to flooding, heatwaves and drought. Working closely with Environment Agency teams, potential areas of focus include the influence of governance, planning, investment and land-use decisions on the delivery of NbS under competing pressures for housing growth, infrastructure development and environmental improvement, as well as the institutional, social and spatial factors that affect their implementation and the distribution of their benefits. By generating new evidence on these challenges, the fellowship will contribute to Environment Agency policy and practice, supporting climate resilience, nature recovery, natural capital enhancement, and sustainable urban development. The precise scope of the research will be co-designed during the inception phase, drawing on both Environment Agency priorities and the fellow's expertise and interests.

Anticipated impact and outcomes:

The fellowship is an opportunity to:

- strengthen the evidence base for the effective and equitable delivery of urban NbS

- provide independent, evidence-based insights to support Environment Agency policy, guidance and partnerships relating to climate resilience, nature recovery and sustainable development
- improve understanding of the conditions that enable successful implementation of NbS and their integration into urban planning, flood risk and water management, and climate adaptation policy and practice
- support delivery of EA2030 ambitions relating to climate resilience, nature recovery and sustainable growth
- build collaborations between academia, the Environment Agency, local authorities and other stakeholders involved in place-based decision-making, to understand barriers to delivery and maximise partnership opportunities
- produce high-quality outputs, such as policy briefings, technical reports and peer-reviewed publications, contributing to both academic knowledge and policy development
- support the translation of research evidence into practical policy and operational decision-making, helping to embed urban NbS within Environment Agency programmes, guidance and wider place-based planning and investment decisions
- inform the evolution of the Environment Agency's NbS policy and guidance, including potential updates to its NbS position paper
- create opportunities for knowledge exchange through workshops, cross-government engagement and other networks such as the UKRI-Defra Maximising UK Adaptation to Climate Change programme (MACC)

Benefits to the Fellow:

The fellow will benefit from:

- the opportunity to co-design, undertake and publish original research with direct relevance to Environment Agency priorities and wider policy agendas across government
- being embedded within the Environment Agency, gaining insight into evidence use and decision-making processes
- participation in academic and practitioner conferences, workshops, and networks including the Environment Agency's Research Profession and Science Profession
- access to relevant expertise, datasets, networks and collaborative opportunities across government, academia and practice
- contributing evidence to wider academic and policy discussions on the role of nature-based solutions in creating more resilient urban environments
- developing their professional networks, policy engagement experience and transferable skills that will support a long-term career bridging research, policy and practice

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:

- demonstrated experience of designing, conducting and/or leading high-quality research relevant to urban nature-based solutions, climate resilience, sustainable urban development, environmental governance, land use, planning or related socio-environmental challenges
- strong knowledge and experience of applying relevant quantitative, qualitative and/or mixed method research approaches, with evidence of the ability to adopt interdisciplinary and innovative approaches to complex environmental and policy challenges
- experience of engaging effectively with diverse stakeholders across academia, policy and practice, supported by strong communication, collaboration and relationship-building skills

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:

- demonstrated experience of working across academic, policy and practice communities to co-produce research, evidence, and policy-relevant insights
- demonstrated experience of translating research findings into policy development, operational guidance, tools, frameworks, decision-making processes, or other policy-relevant outputs
- knowledge of current and emerging policy, practice and research issues relevant to the fellowship topic

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 Environment Agency 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.