UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

FCDO enhancing HMG's capacity to contribute to pandemic preparedness and resilience overseas fellowship

Fellowship type:

Natural hazards and resilience fellowship

Host organisation:

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)

Host team:

The fellow will be hosted by the Chief Scientific Adviser's Science Cell within the Research and Analysis Directorate. They will work closely with the Science for Emergencies Centre programme, including the Natural Hazards Science Hub delivered through Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Met Office and British Geological Survey, and the Multi-Hazard Research Network; as well as humanitarian and geographic policy teams and overseas posts as well as relevant scientific, government, academic and international partners.

Academic discipline/s:

Public health, epidemiology, disaster risk management, development studies, social sciences

Summary:

An opportunity to strengthen the multidisciplinary evidence, analysis and partnerships needed to improve the UK's understanding and prediction of preparedness for and building resilience to pandemic risks overseas.

Policy topic:

Strengthening the evidence base, analytical capability and use of science to support prediction, preparedness, resilience and decision making in relation to pandemic risks overseas and their impacts on people, societies, systems and international stability.

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 will be hosted by FCDO's Chief Scientific Adviser's Science Cell (part of the Global Research and Technology Development GRTD portfolio), with regular in-person engagement with teams and stakeholders based in London and Abercrombie House, East Kilbride, Scotland. The fellow should expect to attend FCDO's London offices, primarily King Charles Street and/or Abercrombie House, alongside flexible hybrid working arrangements. Occasional UK travel and internationally may be required to engage with government, scientific and policy partners.

Hybrid working:

During the inception phase, there will not be a routine weekly office attendance requirement, although some in-person engagement in London and/or Abercrombie House, East Kilbride, Scotland will be expected to support co-design of the fellowship, relationship building and integration with the host team. During the main placement phase, while FCDO has a minimum office attendance requirement of three days a week, in line with the rest of the UK Civil Service, we would be content for a minimum one day a week office attendance, with flexibility depending on the fellow's location and the requirements of the fellowship. During the knowledge-exchange phase, in-person attendance will be agreed according to the activities being undertaken.

The fellowship will operate on a flexible hybrid basis. In-person engagement is an important part of the fellowship, supporting collaboration with FCDO science and policy colleagues, relationship building and access to relevant networks and opportunities across government and partner organisations. A laptop will be provided to enable remote working and access to host systems. Fellows should budget for travel to London and/or Abercrombie House where required. Eligible travel and subsistence costs are supported through the main UKRI grant.

Security clearance and nationality eligibility criteria:

Security Clearance (SC) is required for this role and must be obtained before any part of the fellowship, including the inception phase, can commence. Developed Vetting (DV) is not anticipated for this fellowship. Please see national security vetting: clearance levels for more information. Processing times can vary depending on individual circumstances, and applicants should therefore allow sufficient time for the vetting process. The successful applicant should begin the clearance process as soon as the fellowship is confirmed. Applicants must also meet civil service nationality requirements and should check these before applying.

The role is open to non-UK nationals who have been living in the UK for a minimum of five years at the time of application.

Fellowship position description

Background and policy context

Pandemic risks arise from complex interactions between pathogens, people, institutions, environments and interconnected systems. Their impacts can extend well beyond health, affecting livelihoods, economies, governance, social cohesion, national security and international stability. Effective preparedness and resilience therefore require decision makers to draw on scientific evidence from multiple disciplines and sectors, understand how threats emerge and propagate, assess how impacts may cascade across systems, and translate that evidence into timely, useful and usable advice.

The Chief Scientific Adviser's Science Cell provides scientific advice to support FCDO's preparedness for and response to emergencies. The fellow will be embedded in this operational science environment, contributing both to longer-term research and analysis and, where appropriate, to the assessment of emerging biological threats and the provision of timely scientific advice to FCDO decision makers.

Fellowship focus

The fellow will undertake a broad programme of research, scientific analysis and knowledge exchange focused on strengthening preparedness, resilience and decision making in relation to pandemic risks overseas. Embedded within the Chief Scientific Adviser's Science Cell, the fellow will contribute to Cell's role in assessing emerging threats and providing timely, multidisciplinary scientific advice during international emergencies.

The fellowship may:

- explore how scientific evidence, data, research partnerships, institutional capabilities and international collaboration, including One Health approaches, can support decision-making before, during and after emerging biological threats affecting human populations
- improve understanding of how pandemic risks emerge, propagate and cascade across interconnected systems, and how social, economic, governance and health factors shape vulnerability, preparedness and resilience
- investigate the determinants of pandemic risk and resilience, and identify opportunities for evidence-based interventions that strengthen the ability of societies, institutions and systems to anticipate, withstand, adapt to and recover from pandemic threats
- examine how evidence from multiple disciplines and sectors can be translated into practical policy and operational decisions that reduce risk and strengthen preparedness and resilience
- contribute directly to FCDO's response to the current Ebola outbreak in DRC and future infectious disease outbreaks

Potential areas could include pandemic risk assessment and horizon scanning; preparedness and resilience capabilities; surveillance and early warning; drivers of emergence, spillover and transmission of biological threats affecting human populations; evidence-informed decision making during health emergencies and under uncertainty; international scientific collaboration; health systems resilience; societal, behavioural and governance dimensions; the relationship between pandemic risk and wider pressures, including climate change and conflict; and learning from previous outbreaks and emergencies.

These areas are illustrative rather than prescriptive. The precise questions, methods and outputs will be co-produced during the inception phase. This will allow the fellowship to respond to evolving FCDO priorities while drawing on the fellow's expertise, interests and proposed approach.

Co-design and collaboration:

Co-design is central to the fellowship. During the inception phase, the fellow and FCDO will jointly identify where additional evidence, analysis or insight could add most value.

The fellow will work with the Chief Scientific Adviser's Science Cell, the Science for Emergencies Centre programme partners including it's the Natural Hazards Science Hub and Multi-Hazard Research Network, humanitarian and geographic policy teams, overseas posts, government scientific organisations and

academic partners. Regular policy engagement and review points will ensure the work remains useful, usable and responsive to emerging needs.

The fellow will be encouraged to challenge assumptions, connect perspectives across disciplines and settings, and help strengthen the flow of evidence between research and policy.

Expected outputs:

Outputs will be agreed through co-design and may include original research and analysis; evidence syntheses or rapid reviews; horizon-scanning or strategic insight products; policy briefings; practical frameworks or tools; workshops and knowledge exchange activities; and recommendations to strengthen pandemic preparedness and resilience. The balance of outputs will be shaped by the agreed focus and opportunities for policy impact. There may also be opportunities for external publication of research arising from the fellowship, subject to agreement between the fellow and FCDO and appropriate clearance processes.

Benefits to the fellow:

The fellowship offers the opportunity to work directly with policymakers in the UK and internationally on a high-priority global challenge. Embedded within the Chief Scientific Adviser's Science Cell, the fellow will have opportunities to inform the scientific evidence and analysis used to advise senior FCDO decision makers, including ministers where relevant, and to engage with government partners, overseas posts, scientific organisations and multilateral institutions.

The fellow will gain insight into how evidence is commissioned, assessed and translated into policy and operational advice; apply research to live and emerging questions; and build networks across government, academia and international partners. Appropriate engagement with the FCDO overseas network and partner meetings may form part of the placement, depending on the co-designed scope and operational needs.

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 research track record in a discipline relevant to emerging biological threats, pandemic risk, preparedness or resilience, including i public health, epidemiology, disaster risk management, development studies, social sciences or a closely related field
- expertise in assessing, synthesising and applying multidisciplinary scientific evidence to complex policy and operational questions
- strong analytical skills relevant to understanding emerging threats, uncertainty, vulnerability and cascading impacts across interconnected systems

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 of interdisciplinary or cross-sector research collaboration
- experience engaging with policymakers, governments, international organisations or health emergency actors
- experience designing and delivering knowledge exchange or research impact activities

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 FCDO 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.