UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Foundations developing, testing, or validating measurement tools to strengthen children's services evaluation fellowship

Fellowship type:

What Works Innovation fellowship

Host organisation:

Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families

Host team:

Evaluation team within the Evidence directorate

Academic discipline/s:

Evaluation, social policy, statistics, psychometrics and measurement science

Summary:

An opportunity to strengthen the use of robust, acceptable, and meaningful outcome measurement across children's services evaluation, policy, and practice.

Policy topic:

Improving how outcomes are defined, measured and used to support evidence-informed decision making across children's services, contributing to the government's ambition to break down barriers to opportunity.

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:

Foundations' office is based in central London. The fellow will be fully embedded into Foundations Evidence team. We would invite them to join regular organisational and Evidence team meetings, relevant working groups and project meetings which take place in person and online.

Hybrid working:

Foundations has a two-day a week office working requirement for staff who live within a two-hour commute to the office. We would encourage the fellow to attend twice per week during the inception and main placement phase. We do not anticipate travel as part of the placement, unless there is in-person data collection.

Security clearance and nationality eligibility criteria:

Foundations does not require formal security clearance for this fellowship. Applicants will need to demonstrate their right to work in the UK before interview and appointment.

If the fellowship project includes primary data collection involving children, young people or families, the successful applicant may be required to undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. Any such requirements will be discussed and arranged following appointment where relevant.

Fellowship position description

Foundations is the What Works Centre for Children and Families. We work with local authorities and organisations, service providers, policymakers and researchers to generate, champion and use evidence to improve outcomes for children and families.

A persistent challenge across children's services is ensuring that outcomes are measured in ways that are robust, meaningful, acceptable to children and families, and useful for decision makers. Foundations' recently released our Outcomes Framework and Measures Database to help identify the changes that matter most to children and families and suitable tools to measure those outcomes. However, there is still substantial work needed to support the selection, implementation, testing and use of outcome measures across policy, practice and evaluation.

The fellowship will explore how outcome measurement can better support evidence generation (including theory of change development, evaluation design, evaluation delivery, etc), service improvement and policymaking across children's services. It will align with Foundations' strategic priorities and relevant Department for Education priorities, with the specific focus agreed collaboratively during the inception phase.

Co-design and collaboration

We envisage the fellow undertaking a programme of work within the broad area of outcome measurement, with the precise scope agreed during the fellowship inception phase. The fellowship will be co-designed with the successful applicant to reflect their expertise, interests and Foundations' organisational priorities related to outcome measurement.

Potential areas of focus could include:

- developing, testing or validating outcome measurement approaches for children and families
- understanding the acceptability and usability of existing measures among children, young people and families
- improving the way outcome measures are embedded throughout the evaluation lifecycle, from theory of change development through to reporting and policy influence

- identifying approaches to support local areas, service providers and commissioners to use outcome measures consistently and effectively
- developing guidance or methodologies to support policymakers and practitioners when selecting and implementing outcome measures
- analysing existing evaluation and pilot trial data to better understand the strengths and limitations of commonly used outcome measures

Working across policy and practice

The fellow will be embedded within Foundations' Evidence Team and will have opportunities to engage with colleagues across the organisation, including policy, practice, and impact functions. They will gain insight into how evidence is generated, synthesised and applied in real-world policy and practice settings.

The fellow will have opportunities to engage with:

- Foundations' policy team and its relationships with the Department for Education and other decision makers
- local authorities and sector partners participating in Foundations programmes
- children, young people and families through existing engagement mechanisms where appropriate
- Foundations' Experts by Experience network and wider stakeholder groups, where relevant to the chosen project

Benefits for the appointed fellow

The fellowship provides a unique opportunity to work at the intersection of research, policy and practice in children's services.

Fellows will benefit from:

- contributing to nationally significant work on outcome measurement and evaluation
- opportunities to publish and disseminate outputs arising from the fellowship
- access to Foundations' networks across academia, policy and practice
- participation in organisational learning activities, including journal clubs, webinars and knowledge exchange events
- opportunities to build on previous fellowship work undertaken within Foundations, including existing programmes of work focused on evaluation methods and outcome measurement
- experience translating methodological expertise into practical tools and recommendations for policymakers, commissioners and service providers

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:

- proven expertise in evaluation, applied social research, measurement, statistics or a related discipline
- knowledge of challenges associated with measuring outcomes for children, young people and families in policy, practice or research settings
- understanding of evaluation design, theory of change approaches, or evidence generation in applied settings

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:

- technical expertise related to psychometrics or measurement tool development
- primary data collection experience with children, young people, and families

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 Foundations' 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.