UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

DAERA behavioural insights implementation for climate action and green growth fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

Host team:

The DAERA Behavioural Insights Team commissions and provides behavioural insights to understand and influence behaviours that support climate action and accelerate the transition to sustainable green growth across Northern Ireland.

Academic discipline/s:

Behavioural economics, social psychology, sociology, climate science, human geography

Summary:

An opportunity to embed practical, evidence-informed behaviour change approaches across DAERA to help deliver Northern Ireland's t climate objectives and net zero targets.

Policy topic:

The fellowship will focus on Climate Change and Net Zero, identifying opportunities to embed behavioural insights in policy design and operational delivery to maximise the impact of climate action.

Research career stage:

Open to both 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:

Flexible and open to negotiation with the successful applicant. If based in Northern Ireland, our preference is that the fellow is primarily based with the Behavioural Insights Team at Clare House, Airport Road West, Belfast, with occasional travel to meetings elsewhere in Northern Ireland as required. For fellows based outside Northern Ireland, regular in-person engagement will be expected, with a minimum of six visits during the fellowship, depending on the nature of the agreed work programme.

Hybrid working:

If the successful applicant is based in Northern Ireland, we would expect a hybrid working model. During the inception phase, we would expect a minimum of one day per week in the office, with flexibility to meet business needs. During the main placement phase, we would expect a minimum of two days per week in the office, with flexibility to meet business needs. In-person engagement will provide opportunities to work closely with colleagues, policymakers and stakeholders, helping the fellow develop a deeper understanding of organisational priorities and maximise the impact of their work. Some travel will also be required for stakeholder engagement and knowledge exchange events.

We are open to discussing alternative arrangements with applicants based outside Northern Ireland. Eligible travel and subsistence costs are supported through the main UKRI grant. Please see the full call text and guidance for further 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. Please see national security vetting: clearance levels for more information. An AccessNI check may also be required for applicants residing in Northern Ireland, which typically takes two to three working days. Security check arrangements may vary for applicants based in Great Britain.

Fellowship position description

Northern Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy will require practical, evidence-informed approaches to behaviour change that support fair and effective climate action. This fellowship will be hosted within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and will explore how insights from behavioural or social sciences can support the delivery of Climate Action Plan measures and wider environmental outcomes.

The fellowship will focus on challenges associated with climate and environmental policy implementation that could form a barrier to associated behavioural changes. Areas of interest may include understanding barriers and opportunities related to specific behaviours targeted by the draft Climate Action Plan, improving public engagement and participation in associated policy processes, designing and evaluating behaviourally informed interventions, or strengthening the use of behavioural evidence within Northern Ireland policymaking. The fellow will have the opportunity to undertake original research and analysis in one or more of these areas, with the precise focus agreed during the inception phase and shaped jointly by DAERA priorities and the fellow's expertise and interests. The evidence collected will be determined by the requirements of the fellowship, while taking appropriate account of the fellow's expertise and experience.

The fellow will be embedded within DAERA's Behavioural Insights Team, working closely with policy, analytical, operational and engagement colleagues. This will provide direct exposure to the policy environment and opportunities to collaborate across a range of climate, environmental and rural policy

areas. DAERA will provide line management, office accommodation and appropriate IT equipment to support the fellowship.

Working collaboratively with departmental colleagues and external partners, the fellow will help to identify research priorities, generate new evidence and contribute to the development and testing of practical approaches to effect behaviour change. Particular emphasis will be placed on strengthening public engagement in climate and environmental decision-making through the application of behavioural insights and innovative participatory approaches. This may include exploring how the design, inclusivity and effectiveness of engagement activities can be improved, supporting deliberative and co-design methods such as community engagement panels, community workshops, behavioural trials and collaborative policy development. The fellowship will provide an opportunity to develop and evaluate approaches that enable meaningful public participation, build public trust and thereby support the successful implementation of climate and environmental policies.

Benefits to the Fellow:

This fellowship offers the opportunity to:

- co-design, undertake and publish original research with direct policy relevance for internal departmental audiences as well as for external/academic publication where appropriate, (timing and content to be agreed with DAERA)
- gain an in-depth understanding of how behavioural evidence is applied within government policymaking
- inform and influence climate, environmental and rural policy development in Northern Ireland
- access relevant datasets, evidence sources and expertise across DAERA and partner organisations
- build networks across government, academia and the wider behavioural science community
- participate in knowledge development and exchange activities, including policy roundtables, cross-government workshops and collaborative research networks

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:

- experience of working on climate change or related topics with an academic background in behavioural/social science (for example behavioural economics, environmental science, social psychology, human geography, sociology – list not exhaustive)
- proven professional experience in the practical application of behavioural/social sciences or related research methodologies, with preference for candidates with behavioural sciences experience in climate change, including analysis on social norms and behavioural drivers and their impact on net zero outcomes
- problem solving skills and ability to use initiative and learning to make improvements in programming and operations and to identify solutions

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 developing team or organisational capability, including designing and leading knowledge exchange activity between research and policy
- knowledge and/or experience of the unique nature of Northern Ireland climate, environment, society and politics, including experience of working with public policy research and practice
- academic publications in a relevant field, submitted, in press or in print - commensurate with career stage and experience in communicating complex information to a wide range of audiences

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 DAERA privacy statement 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.