UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

DAERA carbon removal capacity in Northern Ireland fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

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

Host team:

Climate Action Delivery Division (CADD) is part of DAERA's Climate Change, Science and Innovation Group. Its core purpose is implementation of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and specifically the delivery of the Climate Action Plans which set out the policies and proposals required for Northern Ireland to meet its five-yearly carbon budgets.

Academic discipline/s:

Political science, climate science, environmental engineering, physical geography, environmental economics

Summary:

An opportunity to advise on how natural and engineered approaches to carbon removal can be optimised to achieve Net Zero within Northern Ireland's emissions profile.

Policy topic:

The fellowship will focus on the policy challenge of creating a credible and affordable pathway to Net Zero for Northern Ireland which makes optimal use of natural and engineered carbon removals.

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:

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 Climate Action Delivery Division at Clare House, Airport Road West, Belfast with occasional travel to meetings elsewhere in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and 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 has a legislative requirement to meet Net Zero Greenhouse Gas emissions by 2050, similar to commitments in Wales and at UK-level. Northern Ireland faces a very particular challenge in delivering Net Zero due to the relative size and economic importance of its agricultural sector. Full decarbonisation of the agriculture sector is not possible in the same way that can be achieved for the energy sector since biogenic methane is a naturally occurring consequence of livestock agriculture. All reasonable scenarios envisage a relatively high level of residual agricultural emissions in 2050. It will not be practical to “balance” these emissions through land use initiatives only and therefore the CCC modelling identifies that significant levels of engineered removals will be necessary and will proportionally be much more important in NI than the rest of the UK.

Policy development in this area remains in its infancy and there is no clear pathway to deliver sufficient carbon removals in NI. The advised CCC pathway for Northern Ireland assumes that NI is delivering engineered carbon removals by 2033, with capacity rapidly scaling up during the 2030s and 2040s. Urgent advice is required on how to scale up capacity across all aspects of carbon removal to ensure that Northern Ireland has a credible path to Net Zero.

The fellowship is intended to:

- produce informed advice on the contribution which carbon removals should make within Northern Ireland's pathway to Net Zero
- co-design, undertake and publish original research to support development of a Net Zero pathway for Northern Ireland incorporating carbon removals
- identify how NI can learn from best practice across UK, including the £21.7 billion committed by the UK Government to support carbon capture
- advise on the steps needed to ensure Northern Ireland can develop a credible pathway to delivering sufficient carbon removals
- identify policy and research barriers and enablers, including effective means of funding provision
- examine the co-benefits for socio-economic and environmental policy associated with carbon removal strategies, both engineering and land-based
- generate evidence to support the development of key policy frameworks such as the Climate Action Plan
- provide advice on the interdependencies to be managed to deliver carbon removals at scale in Northern Ireland
- add to the understanding of climate policy in Northern Ireland and increase awareness of academic insight amongst policymakers
- provide an opportunity for the research fellow to gain knowledge of governmental policymaking
- build capacity in government to inform the development of a credible approach to this critical policy challenge

The successful candidate will be embedded in the host team with an opportunity to gain in-depth understanding of the climate policy process and to inform and influence government policy in an important area. This will include regular opportunities to engage, learn from and inform a wide range of professionals, including policymakers, statisticians, economists, other researchers and statutory advisers. The successful candidate will be involved in regular inter-departmental working, as well as working with other regional and national governments. There will also be engagement with external organisations as appropriate, including industry and representative organisations. While some of the intended outputs of the fellowship may be most appropriate for internal use as evidence for policymaking with restrictions on publication in the short to medium term, there will also be opportunities for external publication to add to public knowledge in this area and to provide the fellow with a means by which to engage on this work to external audiences. Documents for publication will be subject to agreement between the fellow and DAERA.

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 academic track record in a relevant field (e.g. climate policy, behaviour science, environmental science, ecology, engineering, geography, agricultural science, forestry)
- proven professional experience in the practical application of research to a policy challenge
- the ability to communicate complex information and analysis to a wide range of audiences

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:

- 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
- advanced or specialist technical experience relevant to climate policy, and in particular carbon removals
- interdisciplinary experience (e.g. ability to integrate environmental, economic and social considerations into climate analysis)

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.