UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Ofsted inspection and regulation improvement, social care evaluation fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)

Host team:

Research and evaluation team, insights and research directorate

Academic discipline/s:

Evaluation and social research in children's social care

Summary:

This fellowship is an exciting opportunity to co-design and lead an evaluation strand around Ofsted's children's social care reforms, to generate vital evidence on how the reforms are being experienced by children, young people and their families, and inform real-time refinements to inspection policy and practice.

Policy topic:

The Government's Opportunity Mission to break the link between a child's background and their future success.

Research career stage:

Open to early or 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:

Ofsted's Insights and Research Directorate, within which the fellow will be hosted, has staff presence in our Bristol, Birmingham and London (Canary Wharf) offices. As such, we prefer candidates who can be based in one of these locations. There may occasionally be a need to travel to other Ofsted offices across England, particularly the London office if not based there.

Hybrid working:

Ofsted operates a hybrid working approach. This allows colleagues to benefit from time in the office, with the flexibility to also work from home. Our expectation is that during the main placement phase, the fellow will spend at least 60% of their time working in the office, or at external meetings or events. The exact balance will be discussed and agreed between the fellow and their line manager during the inception phase.

We anticipate that during the inception phase, the fellow will need to travel to the office approximately three times for in-person meetings (once per month). The first in-person meeting will be at the start of the inception phase, at which the fellow will meet their line manager and receive their Ofsted IT equipment. Subsequent in-person meetings during the inception phase will focus on codesigning the fellowship project. Eligible Travel and Subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details.

Security clearance and nationality eligibility criteria:

Basic Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) is required and 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 ESRC and so, ideally, before the inception phase begins. Please see the national security vetting: clearance levels website for more information.

Additionally, we have identified this role as one which requires an enhanced criminal record check via the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). The evaluation activities that are part of this role may bring candidates into direct contact with children or vulnerable adults and may also give candidates access to material or sensitive information about children or vulnerable adults.

Fellowship position description

The fellowship will begin in October 2027 when we will be implementing and evaluating changes to our Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework and the Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF). There is significant scope for the fellow to have an impact on Ofsted's children's social care frameworks, policy and practice by co-designing and leading a strand of our programme of evaluation around these reforms.

The fellow will co-design and lead on one substantial element of a wider evaluation plan that is led by Ofsted's Research and Evaluation Team and may also include other components of in-house or commissioned evaluation. We envisage the fellow will scope and carry out work with children, young people, carers and families to help us understand their experiences of the renewed frameworks. The fellow will help to develop the associated research and evidence base, design robust evaluation methods, develop connections between Ofsted and the research community, and ultimately have a central role in translating evidence into policy and practice for the benefit of children's social care.

A fellow will benefit from:

- codesign of the fellowship project with Ofsted analysts, policy, strategy and communications colleagues, to ensure the project makes the most of our insights, is firmly policy-driven and stands to have the greatest possible impact on policy and practice
- collaboration, support, training and oversight from Ofsted's Insights and Research Directorate
- proximity to interesting and topical policy and delivery decisions

- the opportunity to inform HM Chief Inspector at the Office of Standards (HMCI) and Ofsted's Executive Board
- experience of civil service, Ofsted and sector 'ways of working', to help 'land' research effectively
- access to a network of policy, analysis and research teams in Ofsted and across government
- access to national datasets and information (for use whilst in post only, and subject to security clearances)
- our support with publishing research papers and outputs in academic journals and peer-reviewed publications subject to clearance by Ofsted

Specific deliverables will be agreed during the inception phase of the fellowship. Potential activities could include:

- scoping and undertaking evaluation activities that require collecting primary data and analysing secondary data
- advising on best evaluation approaches to use
- creating evidence summaries, reviews and analysis to meet key policy and operational needs
- examining the existing and emerging evidence regarding children's social care
- developing and challenging others' development of credible evidence-based assumptions about proposals and plans
- supporting the development of Ofsted's capacity and capability in mixed methods research
- designing and organising workshops to provide academic challenge and rigour
- conducting evidence-based horizon scanning exercises

In 2024, we carried out the largest consultation in Ofsted's history, the Big Listen, gathering feedback from children, young people, families, practitioners, providers and local authorities on how inspection and regulation could be improved. Feedback highlighted that while inspection frameworks were valued, there was a need for reports and judgements to better reflect the complexity of children's social care services and the lived experiences of children and young people.

In July 2026, we launched a 12-week public consultation on our proposed reforms to the ILACS and SCCIF frameworks. We invited responses to the proposed changes, which included:

- adopting a set of 'ambitions' which we will use to guide all policymaking for ILACS and SCCIF
- aligning our frameworks more closely with the goals of the government's reforms
- moving beyond headline judgements towards reporting that reflects the real complexity of children's social care
- improving the ways we engage with and include the voices of children, young people, carers and families

In line with the standards and expectations set by the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury Evaluation Task Force, we intend to carry out a programme of evaluation spanning multiple years to assess the children's social care reforms we adopt from April 2027. This evaluation will support our commitment to being an evidence-led, learning organisation. It will help us learn from and improve our policy, practice and training to make sure we have the best impact we can, both on those we inspect and regulate, and on children, young people, parents, carers and families.

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:

- subject matter expertise relevant to children's social care, including an understanding of the children's social care landscape in England and familiarity with the Government's programme of reform in children's social care

- experience of the design, development, management and timely delivery of children's social care research and evaluation, including research and engagement with children, young people and families
- experience, knowledge and understanding of the theory and practice of evaluation methodologies and approaches, particularly implementation evaluations

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:

- familiarity with Ofsted's inspection and regulation in relation to children's social care
- familiarity with the government's Green Book and Magenta Book
- knowledge or experience of children's social care reforms and political priorities

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 Ofsted's privacy notice. Hosts 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.