UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Scottish Government developing a system wide approach to value for money assessment fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

The Scottish Government

Host team:

The fellow will be hosted in the Centre of Expertise in Appraisal and Evaluation. This is a small team of economists and social researchers providing expertise to colleagues right across the Scottish Government. The work of the centre is overseen by the Chief Economist, the Chief Social Researcher and the Head of Economics Profession. The Centre aims to ensure that policies and interventions offer value for money, and that we can learn what does and does not work.

Academic discipline/s:

Evaluation methods, economics, social research, social policy, public administration

Summary:

An opportunity to explore how emerging research and methodological developments in evaluation, appraisal, economics, and public policy can support a coherent approach to understanding and assessing value for money across the Scottish Government.

Policy topic:

Developing a system-wide approach to value for money assessment in the Scottish Government.

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 team is based largely in Edinburgh, with an office in the city centre.

Hybrid working:
There is scope for the fellow to be located remotely and to agree a programme of in-person work in Edinburgh. We envisage the following pattern of attendance, but this can be discussed and agreed with the fellow:

- approximately three in-person days in Edinburgh during the three-month inception phase
- approximately two in-person days in Edinburgh per month for the duration of the main placement phase
- approximately three in-person days in Edinburgh during the knowledge exchange phase

If the fellow is based near Edinburgh or Glasgow and prefers a greater degree of in-person working this can be accommodated. A laptop will be provided enabling work from home or other sites, providing access to host systems.

Security clearance and nationality eligibility criteria:
The fellow will need to pass the Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS). This process takes around six weeks and must be completed before the fellow can access Scottish Government systems. Security clearance should be confirmed before the inception phase can commence. Part of this entails verifying that the fellow meets the Civil Service Nationality Rules - see the Annex C flowchart to check eligibility for non-reserved posts. By applying for this fellowship, you are affirming that you have understood these requirements and expect to be able to pass BPSS.

Fellowship position description

Overview and challenge:
The Scottish Government is delivering an ambitious programme of reform to support its core missions of eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency, and delivering high-quality, sustainable public services. As demand for public services grows and resources remain constrained, there is an increasing need to ensure that public investment delivers the greatest possible impact for the people of Scotland. Central to this agenda is a focus on prevention, improved outcomes, joined-up service delivery, and value for money.

This fellowship provides an opportunity to explore how emerging research and methodological developments in evaluation, appraisal, economics, and public policy can support a more coherent approach to assessing value for money right across government. Working collaboratively with analysts and policy professionals, the fellow will help shape and test innovative approaches to assessing effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and wider public value, supporting the Scottish Government's commitment to using robust evidence to inform decisions and maximise the impact of public spending. The fellowship offers an opportunity to apply academic expertise and systems thinking to live policy challenges, supporting evidence-informed decision-making, resource prioritisation and public service reform, while generating insights of relevance to both government and the wider research community.

Co-design and collaboration:
The fellow will work closely with the Centre of Expertise in Appraisal and Evaluation, Scottish Exchequer, and policy teams to explore how value for money can be understood and assessed in a consistent and meaningful way across government. The detailed focus of the fellowship will be co-designed during the inception phase, drawing on the fellow's expertise and the Scottish Government's priorities.

Potential areas of activity include:

- bringing innovative research and methodological expertise on public value, value for money, evidence-informed policymaking, and evaluation into a live policy environment
- exploring how system wide approaches to value for money assessment can be adapted and applied across a diverse range of policy contexts and intervention types
- investigating how existing approaches, such as the 4Es, public value frameworks, rubrics and theory-based evaluation methods, might be adapted for use within Scottish Government decision-making processes
- exploring methodological challenges associated with assessing value within complex systems where outcomes are shared across multiple organisations and policy areas
- drawing on insights from disciplines such as behavioural science, complexity science, systems thinking and public policy analysis
- working with policy and analytical teams to test approaches in different policy contexts and understanding how value for money assessment can support strategic decision-making

Potential outputs may include new analytical frameworks, methodological approaches, evidence syntheses, guidance, templates, and knowledge-exchange products. The specific outputs will be co-designed during the inception phase.

While the fellowship is centred on value for money, there may also be opportunities to contribute to wider analytical priorities within the Centre of Expertise in Appraisal and Evaluation.

Benefits to fellow:

- being embedded in the Centre of Expertise in Appraisal and Evaluation, with opportunities for direct engagement with analytical and policy teams involved in public service reform, public spending and evidence-based decision-making
- the opportunity to build a network of policy and analytical professionals within government
- an opportunity to shape thinking on value for money assessment across a broad portfolio of government policies and programmes, contributing to the development of Scottish Government approaches and processes
- the opportunity to apply and test academic ideas and methodologies within live spending, appraisal, and evaluation contexts, generating new insights on the practical challenges of assessing value in complex public sector systems
- knowledge exchange opportunities, including policy roundtables, workshops, and internal networks
- opportunity to produce and publish original research, where data and security arrangements allow

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 one or more of evaluation, economics and social research, public policy or related disciplines
- ability to apply quantitative and qualitative research and analytical methods to understand, assess or evaluate policies, programmes, services or complex interventions
- experience of working with and communicating complex evidence effectively to stakeholders beyond academia

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 applying academic research to address public policy problems

- ability to develop, adapt or apply innovative analytical or evaluation approaches to complex policy, public sector or societal issues
- understanding of policy development and delivery, including engagement with policymakers, government, public sector organisations or other non-academic partners

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 Scottish Government's 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.