UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:
Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education AI in higher education fellowship

Fellowship type:
What Works Innovation fellowship

Host organisation:
Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO)

Host team:
Research and Evaluation team

Academic discipline/s:
Economics, education, evaluation, psychology, public policy

Summary:
An opportunity to establish a robust evidence base and evaluation framework to address critical policy and practice gaps regarding the impact of AI on higher education students.

Policy topic:
Opportunity to evaluate the impact of AI on student outcomes in higher education.

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:

Our office is in London, in the Blackfriars area. Eligible travel and subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details.

Hybrid working:

We would prefer the fellow to attend our office in person one day per week during the inception and main placement phase, if possible, with the possibility of attending two days. We have a bi-weekly team meeting, and a bi-weekly research and evaluation team meeting, both of which the fellow would be invited to join. We plan for all staff to be in the office together one day a month and would invite the fellow to join this meeting as well.

Security clearance and nationality eligibility criteria:

There is no security clearance required.

Fellowship position description

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming embedded within higher education (HE). The Higher Education Policy Institute's (HEPI) 2026 Student Generative AI Survey found that nearly all respondents are using AI in some form, and that 94% are using AI to support assessed work in 2026, compared to just over half in 2024. In response to this rapid increase, HE providers are developing institutional AI strategies, policies and assessment practices. However, the increased prevalence of AI in HE risks exacerbating inequalities in student outcomes, influenced by different levels of AI literacy and adoption and AI policies and practices varying between providers and their departments. As a result, a significant evidence gap remains regarding the effectiveness of current responses to AI in higher education and their broader impact on existing inequalities in student outcomes.

In response to this policy area, we envisage the fellow will carry out a research project in one or more of these areas of interest with the scope to be agreed as part of the inception phase:

- synthesising existing research on how AI is currently used across higher education, with a focus on its impact on student outcomes and the widening or narrowing of equality gaps
- refining and expanding TASO's existing outcomes framework to capture AI-related educational activities, interventions, and associated student outcomes
- applying robust evaluation methods to measure the impact of AI-enabled assessment tools and strategies on student attainment and equality gaps

During the inception phase, the fellow and TASO will collaboratively define the overarching project scope, specific research questions, and methodology. To support this initial scoping phase, potential research activities could include a review of existing evidence on AI in higher education and its impact on student outcomes and equality gaps. The fellow will also work collaboratively with TASO to determine how to best consult and engage with the sector to gather evidence on the topic of AI and how it is used currently in HE. Key outputs from this initial phase will be fully co-designed with the fellow and used to inform the main phase of the fellowship.

The main phase of the fellowship will involve the fellow and TASO co-designing and co-leading a research project focused on AI evaluation. The exact research design, methodologies, and focus areas will be jointly determined during the inception phase based on the fellow's specialist interests and host priorities. Furthermore, depending on the priorities established during the inception phase, the fellow may develop quantitative models using secondary datasets or co-design alternative evaluation methodologies to evaluate AI-enabled assessments and equality gaps. The fellow will determine the outputs from this phase, informed by sector need from the inception phase.

The final stage will focus on knowledge exchange and cross-sector network integration, with exact outputs tailored to the research findings and the fellow's dissemination goals. The fellow will be supported by TASO to engage directly with the higher education regulator (OfS) and government officials at the Department for Education (DfE), to jointly inform national AI policy. Findings and resources will be co-authored and co-published on the TASO website and presented at sector conferences, and there will also be opportunities for the fellow to publish research, including submitting co-authored manuscripts to peer-reviewed journals.

Benefits to fellows

Benefits to fellows include:

- an opportunity to lead, produce, and publish high-impact, sector-leading research on generative AI adoption, student outcomes, and equality gaps in higher education
- direct access to TASO's institutional expertise to refine sector-wide evaluation tools
- sustained relationship building and knowledge exchange with national policymakers across the OfS and DfE, as well as senior leaders across major higher education mission groups

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 discipline with expertise in higher education interventions, educational technology, or the pedagogical and institutional implications of AI in learning settings
- strong capability to collate, synthesise, and analyse complex quantitative and qualitative data from higher education providers
- ability to design and conduct robust impact evaluation studies, including experimental designs (such as randomised controlled trials) and quasi-experimental methods

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:

- a proven track record in managing research projects from scoping through delivery and reporting
- a track record of convening stakeholders across higher education, policy networks, and the wider research ecosystem (such as What Works Centres or UKRI investments)
- a commitment to eliminating equality gaps and a passion for the mission of What Works Centres to drive evidence-based policy and practice

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 TASO'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.