UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG) 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, and public policy

Summary:

An opportunity to build a robust evidence base and evaluation framework to address policy gaps in tackling violence against women and girls across higher education.

Policy topic:

Opportunity to evaluate higher education interventions tackling VAWG to improve student outcomes.

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

Students in English higher education (HE) face high rates of sexual violence and harassment, significantly higher than non-higher education peers in the same age demographic. With approximately 1.6 million female students in English HE, higher education represents a critical national setting for VAWG prevention and early intervention. Under the Office for Students (OfS) E6 condition of registration, HE providers in England are required to outline clear policies and procedures for reporting, investigating and addressing harassment and sexual misconduct. However, there is a critical evidence and capability gap regarding how HE providers operationalise these requirements, how interventions are evaluated, and what approaches genuinely reduce harm. In particular, a significant evidence gap remains regarding the effectiveness of current responses to VAWG 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:

- mapping and understanding current activity across HE campuses and workplaces to prevent and respond to VAWG, including how providers meet the OfS E6 condition of registration
- developing an evaluation framework to evaluate campus and workplace VAWG prevention initiatives
- exploring robust evaluation methodologies, including potential trials, for VAWG prevention materials, workplace reporting mechanisms, and training interventions

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 desktop review of English HE policies, initiatives, evaluations and literature focused on the OfS E6 condition and broader VAWG policy context. The fellow will also work collaboratively with TASO to determine how to best collect evidence from the sector on sexual violence and harassment practices and will develop the project research design for understanding student and staff experiences and expectations. 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 leading and developing a comprehensive sector evaluation framework. The exact nature of this framework and its purpose will be informed by the inception phase and the fellow's interests and input. Furthermore, depending on the priorities established by the

fellow during the inception phase, the fellow may design and run short-horizon trials or alternative robust evaluation designs to test interventions and intermediate outcomes.

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) and establish knowledge-exchange links with other What Works Centre initiatives. Findings and resources will be published on the TASO Toolkit and presented at sector conferences, and there will also be opportunities for the fellow to publish research, including submitting manuscripts to peer-reviewed journals.

Benefits to fellows

Benefits to fellows include:

- an opportunity to co-design, produce, and publish original research that directly informs HE institutional responses to harassment and sexual misconduct
- access to TASO's institutional knowledge to develop a rich, practical understanding of the higher education policy process
- sustained relationship building and knowledge exchange with senior leaders across the OfS, officials in the DfE, and university sector leaders, with findings able to directly inform practice across higher education institutions

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 VAWG, sexual misconduct, or gender-based violence in institutional or workplace settings
- strong capability to collate, synthesise, and analyse complex quantitative and qualitative data from higher education providers
- ability to design and conduct impact evaluation studies, including experimental (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, trauma-informed research principles, 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.