UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Wales Centre for Public Policy improving the effectiveness of how What Works Centres engage with local government to improve outcomes fellowship

Fellowship type:

What Works Innovation fellowship

Host organisation:

Wales Centre for Public Policy

Host team:

Academic Research team (Professor James Downe, Dr Hannah Durrant, Dr Paul Vallance, Dr Eleanor Mackillop)

Academic discipline/s:

Knowledge mobilisation, evaluation, local government studies

Summary:

Opportunity to conduct research on how What Works Centres can improve the effectiveness of their engagement with local government and wider stakeholders to improve outcomes.

Policy topic:

Improving the performance/practice of the What Works Network.

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:

This fellowship will be based at the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) at Cardiff University, but most of the research will take place remotely. It will require visits to What Works Centres (WWCs) in London in addition to travel to Cardiff.

Hybrid working:

The fellow's precise working pattern will be agreed during the inception phase considering their needs and circumstances (including travel time, caring responsibilities etc.) We expect the fellow to visit the WCPP offices in Cardiff at least three times during the inception phase to help shape the project. Around six visits to WWCs' London offices are expected during the placement phase. During the knowledge exchange phase, at least three visits to both Cardiff and London is anticipated.

WCPP has a hybrid working policy with staff working in our offices at the Social Science Park at least one day a week. We would encourage the fellow to join in all Centre activities such as team meetings, team development days, journal reading club and social events. This will ensure that the fellow feels fully embedded in and supported by the WCPP team. 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:

There is no security clearance needed for WCPP.

Fellowship position description

The WCPP is seeking to recruit a fellow who will lead a project supporting WWCs to improve the effectiveness of how they engage with local government and wider stakeholders to improve outcomes. WWCs are diverse organisations with different funding arrangements, and ways of working with key audiences. Achieving and demonstrating impact of this engagement is an important priority across the Network and forms part of the Evaluation Task Force's self-assessment for centres.

Local government is a key audience for many centres. For example, the WCPP has established a relationship with Rhondda Cynon Taf council to address health inequalities as part of the NIHR-funded Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC). The What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth uses a maturity matrix tool to assess a local authority or combined authority's use of evaluation in policy making and identify areas for improvement. The Centre for Ageing Better has partnerships with Greater Manchester, Leeds, and Lincolnshire to try out new ways to help people age better that can be shared across the country. Finally, the Centre for Homelessness Impact use evidence and skills sprints to work rapidly with local authorities across the country to turn insights from evidence into plans for action. This project aims to improve understanding of how centres can work with local/combined authorities and other partners at the sub-national level to improve their capacity and capability for evidence-informed policymaking. This capacity for effective policymaking at the local/regional scale is set to become even more important with the current UK government's commitment to devolving more power to this level.

There is extensive research on how organisations generally engage with stakeholders but little analysis of effectiveness nor how knowledge brokers conduct such work. The fellowship will explore existing practice and consider where engagement is effective. For instance, in what ways do WWCs co-determine evidence needs with organisations, how do they work together during a project, and how is the feedback from consultation incorporated into final outputs. The fellow will evaluate the effectiveness of various engagements at the local level and consider if there are methods or approaches that could be introduced to improve current ways of working.

The project will be co-produced with the fellow with the scope to be agreed in the inception phase, but we expect there to be three main components including:

1. A review of the existing literature and practice on knowledge brokering organisations engaging with local government. This will include a synthesis of methods and approaches which have been used internationally to engage such audiences. The fellow will be able to codesign the project using the results from this review.

2. Fieldwork in a sample of WWCs to assess different approaches to stakeholder engagement across centres. This could include the fellow being embedded in a centre to give them an opportunity to engage directly with policy makers and the local policy environment. They could assess the effectiveness of projects where engagement with local government is perceived to be strong.

3. Drawing out and sharing implications for practice from the project with WWCs and other key players in this field (for example, other knowledge brokers and key interested parties in policy and research). This learning phase will include reflection sessions with WWC staff and stakeholders and dissemination activities involving the What Works Council, UK Cabinet Office, ESRC, Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN), the Local Government Association and OECD. Expected outputs to include a report, briefing paper, blog, and academic article.

Benefits to the fellow:

- experience of collaborating with researchers in a WWC to codesign, conduct and publish research on a highly salient topic
- opportunity to apply their knowledge and analytical skills to influence how the What Works Network engages with local government and wider stakeholders
- working with academics in WCPP to publish an academic output from the fellowship, the Centre has a supportive research culture where work in progress can be discussed with colleagues on a regular basis
- developing their research and knowledge exchange skills in a real-world environment
- building a network of contacts in WWCs, universities, policy, and practice and those working on stakeholder engagement across institutions

WCPP has previous experience of successfully hosting fellows and will use the learning from this to work closely with the successful candidate. The fellow will be hosted within the Research Team in WCPP which is funded by Cardiff University and has a strong record of conducting research in this area and working collaboratively. The Centre has excellent contacts with WWCs and will be able to facilitate interactions with those who lead on this topic.

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:

- an established expertise and proven portfolio of research, publications, or relevant professional experience within one or more of the following research fields: applied public policy, knowledge mobilisation, qualitative research methods, local/regional government, stakeholder engagement
- experience of reviewing academic and/or grey knowledge and drawing out key findings in an easily accessible format (such as lay summaries, briefing papers)
- proven ability to develop relationships and work effectively with a wide range of stakeholders including policymakers, academics, and practitioners at the local government level

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:

- proven ability to demonstrate creativity, innovation, and leadership in understanding how to improve the effectiveness of collaborative policymaking
- evidence of collaborations with policymakers, public service practitioners or knowledge brokering organisations
- experience of conducting collaborative research within cross-disciplinary/cross-institutional teams

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.

The WCPP's privacy notice can be found here. Cardiff University 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.