UKRI policy fellowships 2027

Fellowship position

Fellowship title:

Northern Ireland Department of Health Artificial intelligence, productivity and health system reform fellowship

Fellowship type:

Core policy fellowship

Host organisation:

Department of Health, Northern Ireland

Host team:

Digital Health & Care Northern Ireland (DHCNI), working with relevant Department of Health policy teams and partner organisations across Health & Social Care Northern Ireland.

Academic discipline/s:

Health services research, health informatics, implementation science, public policy, data science

Summary:

An opportunity to generate practical evidence on how artificial intelligence can be safely adopted, evaluated and scaled across Northern Ireland's integrated Health and Social Care (HSC) system to deliver measurable improvements in workforce productivity, service efficiency, capacity, access and outcomes.

Policy topic:

Safe and effective adoption of AI to support health system productivity, workforce sustainability and reform; aligned with the NHS Fit for the Future mission and the Digital and Technologies Industrial Strategy sector.

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 fellow will be working within DHCNI and will ordinarily be based in Belfast, primarily at the DHCNI office in Linenhall Street - although there is flexibility on location, with DHCNI presence across a number of sites in Northern Ireland including Castle Buildings Belfast, County Hall Ballymena and Gransha House Derry/Londonderry.

The role will provide opportunities to engage with the Department of Health policy teams and partner organisations across the Health and Social Care system, including HSC Trusts, the Business Services Organisation (BSO), Public Health Agency (PHA) and other regional organisations.

There will be an expectation of occasional travel within Northern Ireland to support stakeholder engagement, site visits, workshops and meeting with partners. All such travel will be agreed and planned in advance.

Hybrid working:

DHCNI operates a hybrid working model. We recognise that applicants may be based in different locations and are committed to supporting flexible working arrangements wherever possible.

During the main placement phase, it is anticipated that the fellow will spend at least one day per week in person within DHCNI or with key stakeholders across the HSC. Increased in-person attendance may occasionally be of benefit to support – for example – workshops, stakeholder engagement activities, other specific project requirements. This is to be agreed, flexibly, with the fellow.

A laptop and access to the relevant systems will be provided to support remote working. During inception, applicants should expect to travel in person for introductory meetings and collaborative planning sessions.

Security clearance and nationality eligibility criteria:

Basic Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) is required, which 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 UKRI. Inception phase can begin before the security clearance process is completed but will be required for the main placement phase. Please see national security vetting: clearance levels for more information. An Access NÍ check may also be required for applicants residing in Northern Ireland, which typically takes two to three working days. Security check arrangements may vary for applicants based in Great Britain.

Fellowship position description

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly being adopted across health and care systems as a means to improve productivity, support clinical and operational decision making, reduce administrative burden and improve outcomes. However, there remains considerable uncertainty as to where it can deliver meaningful benefits, how successful adoption can be achieved at scale, and how health and care systems should evaluate and assure emerging, dynamic and fast-moving technologies in real world settings.

The Health and Social Care (HSC) system in Northern Ireland provide a distinctive environment within which to explore these questions. As a single integrated health and care system, supported by an increasingly converged digital estate including encompass (Electronic Patient Record), NIPACS (Picture and Archiving System), LIMS (Laboratory Information Management System) and other regional platforms, Northern Ireland offers a unique opportunity to examine AI adoption and evaluation at a whole-system level.

Embedded within Digital Health & Care Northern Ireland (DHCNI) and working closely with Department of Health policy teams, the Fellow will have live access to policy decisions and investment programmes. Working also with HSC organisations, clinical leaders, analysts and external partners means that findings from the Fellow's research in generating evidence of the opportunities and challenges associated with AI-enabled transformation could directly influence AI adoption, investment prioritisation and health service reform.

The fellowship will focus on the overarching policy challenge:

- How can Health and Social Care organisations safely adopt, evaluate and scale artificial intelligence in ways that deliver demonstrable benefits for patients, staff and services?

The fellowship is to be collaborative rather than prescriptive. The expectation is that the successful Fellow will shape the detailed programme of work with DHCNI and the Department of Health during inception, likely contributing to one or more of the following areas: AI productivity and performance; implementation, adoption and responsible innovation; evaluation, assurance and real-world evidence. There will be opportunities to engage with senior policymakers, clinicians, operational leaders, academic partners and national stakeholders involved in digital transformation, health policy and AI adoption. The Fellow will be encouraged to bring their own research interests, methodological expertise and academic networks to help refine the focus of the work.

The Fellow is to be fully embedded within DHCNI and provided with office accommodation, IT equipment, line management support and access to the relevant policy and delivery colleagues and networks. They will have the opportunity to contribute to live policy development, engage directly with decision makers and influence approaches to AI adoption across a health and care system undergoing significant digital transformation.

The fellowship will offer a unique opportunity to bridge academic research and public policy, generating practical evidence that can inform decision-making in Northern Ireland whilst also contributing to wider (UK and international) discussion on AI adoption, productivity, evaluation and health system reform.

We will wish to encourage the Fellow to produce publishable outputs from their research so as to influence wider debate on AI-driven productivity and transformation in the provision of health and care services.

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:

- demonstrable research experience in one or more of the following areas: health services research, health informatics, public policy evaluation, data science - or a closely related discipline
- evidenced subject matter expertise in adoption, implementation, evaluation or governance of digital, data driven, or AI technologies within health, care, public service settings
- evidenced strength in analysis and evidence-synthesis skills - including the ability to generate actionable insights from qualitative, quantitative or mixed method research that informs policy or decision making

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 working with policy makers, public sector orgs, or health system leaders to inform policy, strategy or operational decision making
- experience evaluating digital transformation, health technology, AI or innovation programmes in real-world settings

- experience developing or applying approaches to technology assurance, responsible innovation, implementation, benefits realisation or real-world evidence generation

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 Department of Health, Northern Ireland'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.