Open Innovation Team Policy Fellowships 2025

Q&A pack

Open Innovation Team

Application stage

30th January 2025	Applications open. Read over the OIT Policy Fellowship Q&A – is a Policy Fellowship right for you?
24th February 2025	Develop a research question and complete the application form by the deadline.
Early-mid March 2025	Complete a short interview with OIT, followed by a matching session with an academic expert in your chosen research area.

Fellowship underway

Late March 2025	Fellowship begins and lasts a minimum of 80 hours over a flexible period (roughly 6 months).
March-August 2025	Attend regular check-ins with your academic mentor for 6-8 hours per month.
March-August 2025	Attend 2-3 check-ins with OIT staff over the course of the Fellowship.

Output and evaluation

August 2025	Fellowship ends with published research output and/or policy insights presented to your team and research institution.

The Open Innovation Team (OIT) is a cross-government unit that works with experts to generate analysis and ideas for policy, helping colleagues review evidence, engage experts, develop policy and evaluate impact.

Our Policy Fellowship programme gives civil servants (SEO-G6) who have a specific policy-related question the opportunity to be matched with an academic mentor who can help them to answer it.

As well as answering a policy question, the Fellowship gives officials the opportunity to make new contacts, learn new skills and build subject knowledge, including data analysis and interpretation.

In this document you can learn more about the OIT and the Fellowship, along with all the information you'll need to apply.

Should your team require intensive support on a policy project, the OIT also offers paid-for services, including in-depth analysis of the latest academic research, and an evaluation service. Please visit our [website](#) or email us at enquiries@openinnovation.gov.uk for details of how we can support you.

About the OIT Policy Fellowship

What is the OIT Policy Fellowship?

- The OIT Policy Fellowship is a bespoke, flexible, part-time mentoring programme which aims to support officials who want further help and expert insight to answer a specific policy question.
- Over the course of six months, civil servants (SEO-G6) work under the supervision of an academic mentor in a relevant field to research and produce an output based on their policy area.
- Academic mentors are drawn from OIT partner institutions: Brunel University London, the University of Essex, Lancaster University, the University of Surrey and the University of York.
- This round follows a successful second cohort of the Fellowship. In 2023/24, nine civil servants from five different departments were paired with academics from four universities across the UK.

What are the benefits of undertaking a Policy Fellowship?

- As well as answering a policy question, the Fellowship gives officials the opportunity to make new contacts, learn new skills and build subject knowledge, including data analysis and interpretation.
- Fellows from previous cohorts reported more confidence engaging with academic research and experts in their policy area.

Eligibility

Am I eligible to apply for the Fellowship?

- The Policy Fellowship is suitable for any civil servant SEO-G6 who has a specific policy-relevant question that they feel would benefit from further research supported by an academic expert. The Fellowship will equip you with new technical skills, confidence engaging with academic research, and expanded networks of academics working in your policy area.
- Previous cohorts included fellows from: the Cabinet Office, Department for Education, Government Office for Science, Department of Health and Social Care, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Fast Stream.

I'm an analyst, not a policy official – can I apply?

- Yes, you can apply. Civil servants with a technical specialism may particularly benefit from the Fellowship where they can work closely with an academic mentor. Previous fellows have been functional and specialist professionals from different areas of the civil service. They have worked on data, AI, and statistics-focused projects.

How much time am I expected to commit to completing the Fellowship?

- You must be able to commit a minimum of 80 hours over a flexible period agreed by your line manager. The Fellowship is expected to take around six months to complete and requires a commitment of roughly one day per week. This may vary depending on the nature of the question or topic.

Is the Fellowship suitable for teams as well as individuals?

- The Fellowship is a programme to support individuals in the policy development process. Should your team require support on a policy project, the OIT also offers paid-for services, including in-depth analysis of the latest academic research, and an evaluation service. Please visit our website or email us at enquiries@openinnovation.gov.uk for details of how we can support you.

The application process

How do I apply?

- Please complete our short online application form. Applications close on 24ᵗʰ February 2025. If you have any questions about the application form, please contact us at fellowship@openinnovation.gov.uk.

What does the application process involve?

- To complete the application form you will need to have a research question and a brief research proposal that aligns with your area of work and expertise. In preparing your application, it may be useful to look at recent research in that area and identify how it aligns with your team's priorities. You may wish to consider what your policy area is lacking and how it would benefit from specific expertise.

Do I need to request line manager approval before I apply for the Fellowship?

- Yes – you should discuss the Fellowship with your line manager before applying, to ensure that you can dedicate enough time to the programme.

How long does the application process take?

- Once applications close, the OIT will assess applications and arrange short interviews with successful applicants. Following this, applicants will meet with a prospective mentor to ensure their project is a good fit. This process is expected to take around a month, with Fellowships expected to start in late March 2025.

How are successful applicants selected?

- We will select proposals that would benefit most from access to a relevant academic mentor. Please note, fellows will only be selected if there is a suitable mentor available.

How are fellows matched to academic mentors?

- If your application progresses, you will have a short interview with OIT staff followed by a 'matching' meeting with a prospective academic mentor. During this meeting the academic will help you refine your research question and assess the suitability of your project based on their expertise and research interests.

Research questions and policy areas

This year we have expanded the programme with mentors who specialise in a wide range of research topics, including but limited to:

Education

- Educational inequalities
- School effectiveness
- Mental health and education
- Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Sex and relationships education
- Language and literacy education

Health & Social Care

- NHS workforce and organisation
- Digital healthcare and medical interventions
- Adult and family health
- Ageing
- Palliative care
- Mental healthcare
- Health inequalities
- Child poverty, food insecurity and nutrition
- Disability and accessibility
- Child development

Environment & Sustainability

- Sustainability in the curriculum and research
- Sustainable energy and alternative fuels
- Environmental engineering
- Circular economy
- Sustainable materials
- Decarbonisation

- Clean water, air quality and pollution
- Coastal defence
- Green digital infrastructures

Artificial Intelligence, Digital & Data

- AI and digital healthcare
- AI policy and transformation
- AI and robotics
- Cybersecurity for businesses
- Green digital infrastructures

Government

- Intelligence and security
- Electoral modernisation and integrity
- Government communication strategies
- Productivity, innovation and transformation

Business, Work & Employment

- Work and employment
- Working carers
- Management science and industrial organisation
- Entrepreneurship and strategy

Other Policy Areas

- Creative industries
- Coastal communities
- The justice system
- Inequalities (including health, education and income)

What have previous fellowship projects focused on?

Some examples of previous fellowship projects include:

- Teachers using AI tools in the classroom
- Integration interventions and alternative provision
- AI tools for automated trade services
- Regulating AI as an emerging technology
- Green skills gaps

Are there restrictions on the type of research topics I can propose?

- Although we have a large number of available mentors, applicants will only be matched to mentors suitable to supervise a project in their chosen policy area. Please consult the list of available research areas above and ensure that your research question is relevant to at least one of these.

How do I ensure my research question is feasible?

- Think carefully about the scope of your research question and the evidence or data you need to answer it, and whether it is feasible to access or collect this in the 80 flexible hours the Fellowship is expected to take.

What to expect during the Fellowship

What kind of support can I expect during the Fellowship?

- Academic mentors will provide one-on-one expert support and advice throughout the Fellowship. You are expected to meet with your mentor for six to eight hours a month in mentoring sessions. For some projects, a PhD student or postdoctoral researcher may be assigned to provide additional support, but this is not mandatory and depends on your research question and availability.

Where will my mentor be based?

- Successful candidates will be partnered with an academic mentor from one of the OIT partner institutions: Brunel University London, the University of Essex, Lancaster University, the University of Surrey or the University of York. Meetings between mentors and fellows can be held in-person or remotely.

![Open Innovation Team logo]

What kind of output can I expect to produce during the Fellowship?

- Fellows are expected to produce a research output (e.g. a policy paper or a literature review) based on their work during the Fellowship.
- You will also be required to complete an evaluation based on your experience of the Fellowship.

Can I see examples of previous fellows' projects?

- An example of research output from the Policy Fellowship can be found here.

Further information

My question isn't answered here – who can I contact?

- For specific queries about the Fellowship or the application process, please contact us at fellowship@openinnovation.gov.uk
- More information, including the application form, can be found on our website. The application window closes on 24th February 2025.

Georgina Kaye

Policy Adviser, DfE

"*The Policy Fellowship was a really insightful experience - it gave us the chance to test our ideas with academics and structure our research effectively. Regular check-ins kept us on track, and we delivered an internal report that supported our department's policy work. I'd recommend the fellowship to policy officials looking to fill evidence gaps - or even map them out!*"

Dr Nikolaos Barkas

Smart Data Challenge Prize Policy Lead, DBT

"*The AI fellowship I completed in collaboration with Brunel University was transformative for both my department and my personal growth. It allowed me to explore the use of AI in trade advisory services, significantly reducing misconceptions and enhancing clarity in our approaches. The exceptional support from the academic mentors and the Open Innovation Team not only enriched my research but also fostered a collaborative environment that propelled our departmental initiatives forward.*"