

ESRC Public Sector Placement Fellowship Scheme



An opportunity for social scientists to make an impact on policy and for public sector employees to spend time within academia.

The ESRC Placement Fellowship Scheme is an opportunity for social scientists within UK HEIs to work with partner organisations on projects of policy-relevance and to upgrade the research skills of partner organisation employees.

We use the term 'partner' to mean Government Departments and Devolved Administrations and other public sector agencies.





The ESRC Placement Fellowship Scheme

AIMS:

- To promote knowledge transfer between academic departments and 'partner organisations' and the staff employed within them
- To provide 'partner organisations' with research-informed evidence to develop and review policy
- To expand networks for 'partner organisations' into academia
- To provide career development opportunities and offer skills updating
- To enable all parties, including ESRC, to develop their understanding of research and policymaking processes and the interactions between them.

DURATION:

The minimum period for a fellowship will be three months and the maximum a year. Some flexibility might be negotiated on the proportion of a Fellow's time devoted to the award. Shorter awards would be expected to be close to full-time.

LOCATION:

Fellows would normally be expected to spend at least 50 per cent of the Fellowship in the host organisation's offices, although some work might require time to be spent at other locations in the UK or abroad.

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS:

During the Fellowship, the Fellow will remain employed by his/her academic institution. All agreed costs will be shared equally by the ESRC and the partner.

MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION:

The partner will nominate a line manager to whom the Fellow would report. The ESRC will nominate a contact person who would be actively informed about the progress of the Placement.



CASE STUDIES

Dr Tim Harries, Middlesex University – Defra

Dr Tim Harries, of the Flood Hazard Research Centre, at Middlesex University, was seconded to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) where his key role was to provide academic insights for policymakers on how to encourage floodplain residents to take long-term measures to prepare for flooding.

The placement grew from a PhD thesis on this topic produced by Dr Harries under an ESRC CASE Studentship, which was co-sponsored by the Environment Agency. In this, he had identified anxiety management and social identity as key factors influencing behaviour.

During the placement, Dr Harries drew on his previous investigation, his knowledge of the academic field of risk research, and his skill as a social researcher to input into Defra's *Making Space for Water* policies. He also managed and conducted new research which looked at the barriers to take-up of long-term flood protection measures, and evaluated a pilot programme which offered grants for these measures.

The main outcome from the project was a draft policy on promoting property-level flood protection and resilience which was published in the form of a public consultation document and an associated impact assessment.

“The placement fellowship met my expectations entirely. Not only did it give me the opportunity to apply my own research findings to a policy context, but by doing so it helped me gain a much improved understanding of how policy development works, and of the role – or potential role – of social science evidence in that process.”

Dr Tim Harries, Middlesex University on his Placement Fellowship with Defra

Dr Alec Morton, London School of Economics – National Audit Office

The Placement Fellowship Scheme allowed Dr Alec Morton, of the London School of Economics, to work with the National Audit Office's (NAO) Value for Money (VFM) Development Team.

Dr Morton's research interests and expertise are in the application of systematic methods and mathematical and computer modelling, to help organisations deal with situations where values are contested and there are significant uncertainties.

His experience includes healthcare planning; hospital capacity management; radioactive waste; appraisal and planning of science; and operational research in Government and air transportation.

The Fellowship involved examining the NAO's approach to gathering and analysing evidence, and identifying methods which could enhance the quality of this activity and the robustness by which it is carried out.

During the Fellowship Dr Morton: authored a chapter for the NAO's 'methods toolkit'; organised a successful programme of seminars; performed a series of analyses to support the NAO's internal corporate planning and performance monitoring; and contributed to various pieces of modelling work to assist particular NAO studies on immigration and healthcare.

“The Fellowship appears to have exceeded expectations on both sides. The benefits to me include learning about new areas of the public sector, having an opportunity to contribute to the improvement of public sector performance, and gaining a strategic view on the public sector. Along with all that, the experience has helped me build what I hope will be a number of ongoing relationships.

The benefits to NAO have been access to expertise which it would not otherwise have had, opportunity to see that expertise in the context of its work, and a broadening of the organisation's thinking about methods”

Dr Alec Morton, London School of Economics on his Placement Fellowship with the NAO

“It has been extremely valuable to have Alec in our team for six months. He has certainly widened our horizon in terms of applying operational research methodologies in our work and, most importantly, has put this into practice by working with several teams on their studies. We also benefited from Alec's wider academic network as he organised a very successful seminar series for us”

Elena Bechberger, Head of Methods and Innovation, NAO

Enhancing educational research in Scotland

Dr Joan Stead, of the Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh said of her Placement Fellowship with the Scottish Government,

“I found the placement useful, challenging and worthwhile and would strongly recommend its continuation. I appreciated the flexibility, goodwill, and accommodation of both agencies which recognised and supported the importance of the informal and unquantifiable nature of much of what happened – this encouraged several ad hoc contacts and tasks that I believe resulted in valuable knowledge exchange”.

Towards a better understanding of different innovation practices in the UK

The Placement Fellowship Scheme allowed Dr Marion Frenz, of Birkbeck University of London, to spend time within the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. She said,

“The Fellowship much exceeded my expectations, and I hugely enjoyed the experience. Issues relevant to the policy community are also topics likely to be at the forefront of academic research, and I feel that my work has been helped through this opportunity”.





An opportunity for staff in Government Departments to work within academia

The ESRC also encourages staff within Government Departments to spend time within academic institutes working on projects of specific interest. Dr Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes, a social researcher based in the Higher Education Directorate of the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), is currently on a 12-month Fellowship at the Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship at De Montfort University.

She is exploring the extent to which British Indian and Chinese students and graduates are engaged in international entrepreneurship, the characteristics of the entrepreneurial activities they are engaged in, the role of entrepreneurship education in promoting entrepreneurship activities among them, and the extent to which diaspora social networks facilitate international business development. She has undertaken about 140 interviews with student, graduate and academic entrepreneurs, Government officials, universities and intermediary organisations, mainly in the UK and also in China.

“I think this is a great Scheme. I have enjoyed the opportunity to undertake policy-focused empirical research. I am in the unique position of being able to benefit from the academic rigour provided by a university as well as easy access to policy colleagues which allows me to keep abreast with changing policy priorities. I would welcome the opportunity of another secondment.”

Dr Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes



ESRC Parliamentary and Government Postgraduate Placement Scheme

If you are an ESRC-funded postgraduate student looking for invaluable experience of working in a policy environment and want to enhance a range of transferable skills such as networking; report writing and communication skills then this Scheme could be for you. It offers a valuable opportunity for new social scientists to gain first-hand experience of how Government works.

The Scheme provides funding for postgraduate students to spend three months in a Government Department or parliamentary office where they work as part of a team informing parliamentarians and policymakers on the economic and/or social impacts of the topic under review.

The placements provide students with the valuable opportunity of working in a non-academic environment gaining an understanding of policy development and networking with influential figures within the Westminster/Whitehall village.

During the placement, students explore a policy topic which is usually related to their research interests. Previous students have been involved with subjects ranging from Government accountability; water management; and healthy life expectancy to computer crime and public attitudes to science.

During the placements, students are expected to produce a short briefing paper, to contribute to a policy report, or to assist a select committee in a current inquiry.

To find out more about the Scheme visit:

http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Support/postgraduate_students/index50.aspx?

To find out more about the ESRC's Placement Fellowship Scheme contact:

Lesley Lilley in the Knowledge Transfer Team

lesley.lilley@esrc.ac.uk

01793 413033