



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Defra R&D Fellowship Programme 2025/26

Candidate Information Pack

Please Note: The contents of this pack are for information only. They do not form a part of the assessment and selection process.



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Welcome from Professor Gideon Henderson

Director General for Science and Analysis and Defra Chief Scientific Adviser

Thank you for your interest in joining Defra as part of our Defra R&D Fellowship programme.

This programme is designed to provide an opportunity for external scientists and analysts to gain experience working in a policy focused environment.

As an R&D Fellow, you will be based within our core Defra team but may also have the opportunity to collaborate with our Arms-Length Bodies across our varied programme of work. You'll be immersed in a Defra team and use your scientific and analytical skills to support this team in bringing R&D to bear on an important policy issue.

This programme is well suited to early to mid-career researchers who are seeking to gain experience of working at the policy interface through a short-term position. We also welcome applications from a range of career stages, backgrounds and experiences.

I'm really excited about the opportunities that you will have as a scientist or analyst joining us on this programme and about the new skills and expertise you will bring to the department. Being embedded in Defra will provide you with valuable insight into the policy-making process, particularly how research is used to inform decisions. Working directly with our teams will give you the opportunity to work in an interdisciplinary environment and build a network of science, analysis and policy contacts.

Whether you are interested in a policy or research career, or in something completely different, a fellowship with Defra will develop your transferable skills, providing you with valuable experience in bringing science and analysis to tackle some of today's biggest policy challenges.

I look forward to welcoming you to our team.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gideon Henderson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined.





Contents

- Welcome to Defra
- Defra's Vision and Mission
- Science and Analysis in Defra
- Location and Contract Type
- The Application Process
- About You
- Terms & Conditions and Benefits of Working for Defra
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Things You Need to Know





Why join Defra?

Our vision is to create a great place for people living in this country

In the Defra group, we deal with a vast range of issues that profoundly impact on people's lives.

We are responsible for England's environment, our countryside and rural economy, the food and farming sectors and have lead responsibility for protection from a wide range of natural threats and hazards.

We have developed a set of three strategic objectives covering our policy outcomes and corporate objectives. These objectives help us to deliver our ambitious vision to build our green and healthy future and provide a framework for all the important work we carry out.

Our objectives are:

- To pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future.
- To lead the world in food, farming and fisheries with a sustainable model of food production.
- To be an outstanding organisation focused on making a difference, with world class delivery capability.

Useful Information

[Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[25 Year Environment Plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)





Defra's Priority Outcomes



Environment:

Improve the environment through cleaner air and water, minimised waste, and thriving plants and terrestrial and marine wildlife



Net zero:

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon storage in agricultural, waste, peat and tree planting sectors to help deliver net zero



Floods & resilience:

Reduce the likelihood and impact of flooding and coastal erosion on people, businesses, communities and the environment



Agriculture, food, fisheries, animal welfare and biosecurity:

Increase the sustainability, productivity and resilience of the agriculture, fishing, food and drink sectors, enhance biosecurity at the border and raise animal welfare standards



Defra is a science-based department. We use research and analysis to inform policy and delivery decisions to drive innovation and growth in the UK's diverse environmental sectors. We work to mitigate environmental risks and use international diplomacy to collaborate on mutual challenges. With an ever-increasing number of highly complex and interconnected challenges, such as delivering net zero, addressing biodiversity loss, preventing flooding and bolstering our food resilience in a changing world, science and analysis is critical for addressing these. Further information on Defra's medium- to long-term research interests are set out in [Defra Groups Research and Innovation Interests](#).

Defra group's strong science and analysis capabilities are central to the delivery of our R&D ambitions. Defra group employs more than 5,000 people using science as a key part of their role. Many of these scientists work in Defra's Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) delivering operational science and monitoring (such as animal disease testing or water quality measurements). In addition, the Department employs a variety of analysts, largely in Core Defra, who provide policy makers with the economic, social science, statistical, operational research and other analysis needed to make effective policy.

The R&D Fellowship Programme provides an exciting opportunity to join our team of scientists and analysts on a current or emerging policy issue. Fellows will work within one of the following example areas:

- **Analysis** - monitoring and evaluation; social science of public perceptions; modelling of policy scenarios including economic and environmental impacts. Analysts include social and operational researchers, economists, statisticians, and geographers. Analysts will be allocated a project that could span Defra's portfolio and are not required to fall into a topic specialism.
- **Agriculture, Food and Farming** – food security; food authenticity; land use; stakeholder engagement; genetics; novel fertilisers; modelling future schemes; ensuring science and evaluation underpins Environmental Land Management.
- **Animal and Plant Health and Welfare (APHW)**- evaluating bio surveillance networks; tree pests and diseases; economic frameworks for managing aquatic animal disease.
- **International Biodiversity & climate change**- international strategy and emerging markets, sustainable solutions, biodiversity loss and climate change, international science strategy, new technologies for monitoring biodiversity, including plants and fungi, consequences of illegal deforestation, evidence reviews.
- **Marine and fisheries**- marine species bycatch.
- **Natural environment, trees and landscape**- assessing pressures and actions needed to support species extinction targets; recovering threatened species; understanding the impacts of river restoration and climate change; assessing areas of concern with regard to pollution ; soil health.
- **Resources and Waste** - circular economy; reducing plastic waste; improving packaging sustainability.
- **Strategy & Innovation**- environmental monitoring; centres of excellence e.g. DNA and earth observations; bioengineering.



Examples of current (2024/25) Fellowship Projects



Science & Analysis | Biodiversity: What

does a resilient landscape look like in 2042?

In 2022, the UK government set a legally binding target to create or restore at least 500,000 ha of wildlife-rich habitat in England by 2042. Through this project you will compile and develop land use scenarios optimised for different outputs, using existing modelling tools and will organise workshops involving researchers, public body scientists and policy makers to present scenarios and initiate discussion about priorities and principles for guiding future delivery for resilient and diverse landscapes.

Analysis | Resources and Waste:

Transitioning to a circular economy is a vital component of delivering sustained improvements to the environment, economy, and society. Through this project you will help us develop a clear understanding of the material and product landscape across England and how our resources interconnect across their value chain. This understanding will enable us to test, implement, and track progress on advanced policy solutions and drive society towards circularity.

Science | Animal and Plant Health:

Could you help establish and evaluate outcomes from five pilot projects to test opportunities for improving biological surveillance under the National Biosurveillance Network (NBN)? The NBN is a major cross-government initiative to facilitate the accurate, faster detection of biological threats to the UK. On this project you will investigate scalable data-science for environmental surveillance; establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; work closely with deep subject specialists at Defra, APHA, Cefas and VMD and UK Health Security Agency and develop policy thinking about the future vision of the NBN.

Behavioural Science and Analysis |

Marine and Fisheries: Exiting the EU has meant new policies and regulatory arrangements being developed, requiring increased public engagement and formal consultations on commercial and recreational fisheries management. Could generative AI tools help by creating questions, summarising responses, sentiment analysis, and anonymizing data? Engaging with legal, communications, and social research teams and the cross-government working group on AI you will take a systematic approach to the potential application of generative AI tools in Defra's consultations.

Economic Analysis | Systems,

Innovation and Futures: Driven by recent policy drives to involve the private sector in financing positive environmental outcomes, Defra needs to explore options for improving the supply of finance to its sectors. Engaging with the investor community to gather insights to inform the evidence review and pinpoint priority areas for investment, this project complements our other work understanding how the financial system and macro-economy are generating green finance. You will develop options for drawing in private investment, particularly venture capital finance, to support the commercialisation of technical innovations in Defra sectors.

Social Research and Analysis |

Environment and net zero: In this project you will help Defra to more fully utilise our data about environmental attitudes by creating novel insights. Using a wide evidence base and qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups you will develop environmental personas that bring to data to life. This project will involve liaising with a wide range of stakeholders to understand user needs and building positive relationships to share data and expertise across Defra and beyond.



Location, Contract Type and Reasonable Adjustments

Office attendance

Successful candidates are expected to work from one of the Defra hub office locations listed in this advert in order to connect with their colleagues, as required by their role and business team needs. Defra's current policy is that at least 60% of the working week should be spent at an office location, averaged over a month. Exceptions will only be considered where the project is in close collaboration with a Defra Public Sector Research Establishment.

For information, our core Defra hub locations are:

- York – Kings Pool
- Newcastle – Lancaster House
- Bristol – Horizon House
- London – 2 Marsham Street

Further information relevant to the post will be available for candidates invited to interview.

Please be aware that role(s) will be contractually based in a Defra group workplace/office, unless they are working with one of Defra's arm length bodies (ALB) and are based at ALBs location. The successful candidate is required to carry out all their duties from a UK location and cannot do so from an overseas location at any time.

Contract type

Fellows will join us as short-term appointments in Defra, for up to 1 year, with salary costs provided by Defra. We aim to onboard most Fellows as a cohort by 1st April 2025, but we can offer flexibility about start date and duration on a case-by-case basis, with a minimum of 3 months duration. Fellowships are available on a full time or part time basis. Our Fellowship contracts will end before 30th March 2026. Secondments may be offered by exception (i.e. fellows remain an employee of their present institution) - these will be considered on a case-by-case basis; we would expect that your salary would be in line with the advertised salary bandings.

What reasonable adjustments can be made if I have a disability?

We are committed to making reasonable adjustments for all disabled applicants and will try to remove any barriers so you are not at a disadvantage during the selection process including, for example, allowing extra time during informal discussions, or ensuring that information is provided in an accessible format.

If you feel that you may need a reasonable adjustment to be made please contact us in the first instance. If you wish to receive a hard copy of the information, or in an alternative format e.g. Audio, Braille or large font then please contact: RDF.Recruitment@defra.gov.uk. This mailbox is monitored between Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm, and candidates should expect a response within 2 working days.



The Application Process

How to apply

Your application should be submitted through our online form at <https://forms.office.com/e/76PrqM1PN6>

This will include information about your employment history, qualifications, and a 500-word Personal Statement.

Please use the Personal Statement to outline your relevant experience and skills, and your motivation to join Defra and our Fellowship Programme. You will also be invited on the form to express your preferred policy area(s) of interest and location.

We will assess your technical skills, expertise, communications skills, and motivation for the role. You are not expected to already have significant policy experience, as we will help you to develop these skills during your Fellowship.

Defra is committed to 'anonymous' sifting. That means that identifying characteristics such as your name, gender, age, address are removed from your application until after shortlisting for interview has taken place.

Selection process details

We will sift applications after the closing date.

This initial sift will review your application against the skills and experience required for the role as outlined in the job advert.

Shortlisted candidates will be invited for an interview with the relevant team at Defra. This interview will cover your relevant skills and experience, and motivations for applying for the Defra R&D Fellowship Programme.

Successful candidates will be matched to a specific project and team based on your experience and expertise, using information from your application and interview.

Please note, fellows appointed on the 2024/25 Defra R&D Fellowship Programme are not eligible to apply.

Data privacy statement

Please see our [data privacy statement](#) which explains how Defra will collect and use your personal data.



About you

We welcome applications from a range of backgrounds, career stages and experiences.

The available roles cover a wide variety of topics and a breadth of skills, so we would encourage applications from a broad range of candidates, including social scientists, modellers, economists, statisticians, engineers, as well as natural and environmental scientists.

As a Defra R&D Fellow, you will have the following qualifications and skills:

- An undergraduate degree, including degree apprenticeships, in a science, engineering, or analytical discipline.

And:

- A postgraduate degree, or expect to have a postgraduate degree before 1st April 2025, in any science, engineering or analytical discipline;

OR

- Be a chartered engineer or scientist registered by one of the professional institutions licensed by the Engineering Council or by the Science Council;

OR

- Demonstrable equivalent experience gained in any science, engineering, or analytical discipline (over 3 years for HEO level and over 5 years for SEO level).

For all roles we are looking for candidates to demonstrate the following:

- Experience of working as a researcher and/or in an R&D environment
- Good communication skills; being able to translate science or analysis to both peers and non-specialists
- Evidence of being able to manage your own workload and prioritise
- An ability to work effectively in a team environment
- Experience of delivering sustained projects (e.g. research projects)

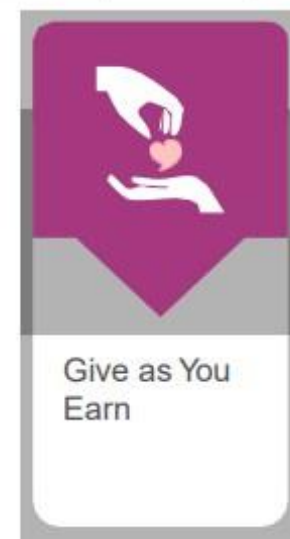
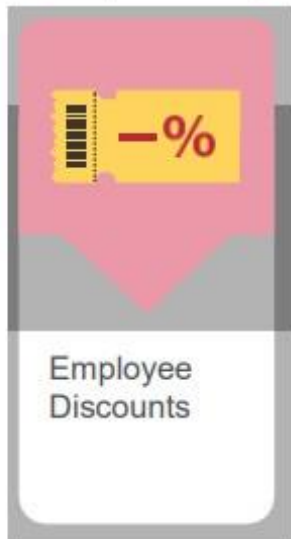
For the more senior fellowships, at SEO grade, candidates will also be able to demonstrate the following:

- Experience in project or programme leadership in a science, engineering, or analytical context
- Experience in creating and using networks across organisational boundaries



Terms & Conditions and Benefits

Benefits of working for Defra





Terms & Conditions and Benefits

Defra offers an attractive and competitive benefits package, including:

Core Benefits

Basic Salary

Based on grade, skills, and experience, in which salary ranges and individual salaries are subject to review each year. These fellowships may be eligible for a non-pensionable, non-consolidated Specialist Skills Supplement of £3,000 per annum (pro rata as appropriate) for candidates joining on short-term assignment contracts.

Pension Scheme

Payable to Death Benefit Nominee, should you pass away whilst in service.

The default pension scheme is Alpha – a career salary average, defined benefit scheme. You build up pension at a rate of 2.32% of your pensionable earnings each year. You and your employer will contribute a percentage of your pensionable earnings (depending on how much you earn) towards your pension. Benefits include a lump sum. Alternatively, you can choose to join a Partnership Defined Contribution pension scheme. This is a scheme in which you do not have to contribute.

Your employer will contribute to your pension based on your age bracket. If you do choose to contribute, then your employer will match your contribution up to an additional 3%. [Visit the Civil Service Pension Scheme](#) for more details.

Flexible Working

Flexible working patterns including job share.

Holidays

Attractive annual holiday entitlement starting at 25 days rising over 5 days to 30 days plus statutory bank holidays (pro-rata for flexible workers, i.e. part time, job share employees). We also offer 1 privilege day for the King's birthday and up to 3 days of volunteering leave each year.

Enhanced Statutory Policies

Enhanced maternity, adoption and paternity leave, and sickness absence provisions. Note: service linked eligibility conditions apply.

Performance Management

Individual performance plans, learning and development matched to your agreed career objectives and progression plans.

Learning & Development

A range of training courses, apprenticeships, leadership development initiatives and access to L&D materials are available, covering technical, managerial, and personal skills.

Examination Leave

Paid leave for exams and revision for approved studies.

Professional subscriptions

We will pay the membership fees for one relevant professional association.

Travel & Transport Benefits

A range of travel and transport benefits. Access to the cycle to work salary sacrifice scheme that enables you to buy a bike up to the value of £4k.

Shopping & Leisure Benefits

A variety of discounts at online stores and leisure experiences available via Mylifestyle.

Tenancy Deposit Scheme Financial Education Hub

Providing guidance on how to manage your finances including information on credit scores, pensions, buying your first house and getting debt-free.

Health Discounts

Optional discounts provided by a number of external providers and health clubs.

Eye Care

Free eye tests.

Local Benefits

These vary from region to region.

Cycle to Work Scheme

We offer access to a salary sacrifice Cycle to Work Scheme. This means we loan you a bike for your commute as a tax-free benefit.

Occupational Health

Access to Duradiamond Healthcare advisory service.

Employee Assistance Service

Access to Workplace Wellness available to you and your family.

Sports & Social Club

Opportunity to benefit from a wide range of subsidised events and discounts.

Special Leave

Additional paid leave is available for employees taking part in public duties, trade union activities, special/trained forces and for health & safety representatives.

Charity for Civil Servants

Provide support and advice for thousands of people, both past and present, when they need it.

Headspace

Free access to Headspace which is a mindfulness, meditation and sleep app.

Give as You Earn

You can make regular deductions directly from your salary in support of a chosen charity. This is simple and tax efficient.

Note: not all benefits will apply to candidates on secondment basis.



Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

We passionately believe in equality, diversity & inclusion and we match that belief with action.

Defra's vision is to be an inclusive organisation where every individual has equality of opportunity to progress and to apply their unique insights to making the UK a great place for living. At Defra we want you to have a respectful, welcoming and engaging working environment, free from discrimination regardless of age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, faith or belief, sex, sexual orientation, social background, trade union activity, caring responsibilities or working pattern.

We encourage applications from neurodiverse people and believe it is only through having a mix of ideas and ways of thinking that we will be able to have a culture which produces high quality work.

We have many active staff networks including Age, Mental health, Cancer, Carers, Disability, EU nationals, Ethnic Minority, Faith and Belief, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Asexual and Transgender (LGBAT+), Social Mobility, Women and Work life Balance. They are supported by senior champions and encouraged to take an active part in the development of our organisation.

We offer career development through a range of both internal and Civil Service wide talent schemes, mentoring, sponsorship and reverse mentoring. Our senior leaders talk authentically and with passion about what they are doing personally to support equality, diversity and inclusion. We promote and support a range of flexible working patterns to enable staff to balance home and work responsibilities, and we treat people fairly irrespective of their working arrangements.

We want to create inclusive cultures where employees from all backgrounds thrive; and to build and sustain a diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of the UK working age population. We want everyone, regardless of background or of grade, to have a sense of belonging, to feel able to bring their authentic self to work, and to have a voice in the organisation. We will not tolerate discrimination, bullying, harassment, victimisation or negative stereotyping.

You can read more in our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy: [Equality and diversity - Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672222/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2020-2025.pdf) (www.gov.uk)



As a Disability Confident employer, we positively welcome applications from disabled people. We are committed to making workplace adjustments wherever possible to ensure that disabled people can participate fully, not only in the recruitment and selection process, but when they are appointed into their job. We offer a guaranteed interview scheme for all disabled applicants who provide evidence of meeting the minimum requirements necessary for the post.

Please get in touch with us at any stage of the recruitment process to discuss how we can help you whether you have a physical impairment, a mental health condition or are neurodiverse.

Once you are appointed your line manager will work with you to identify any workplace adjustments which we can make to meet your needs and enable you to carry out your work.





Things you need to know

Pre-Employment Checks

Everyone employed in the Civil Service is subject to security checks.

These security checks, known as pre-employment checks, are conducted to verify your: identity, employment history; right to work; eligibility under nationality rules; and any unspent criminal convictions.

These checks ensure that candidates are entitled to work in the UK and possess the honesty, integrity and values for government-related work.

Depending on the level of checks needed for the role, you may need to provide at least three documents so we can evidence your identity, nationality, full permanent address, signature and date of birth.

These could include:

- Current British Passport
- Birth Certificate - issued within 12 months of birth
- Bank, building society or credit card statement
- Current photo card driving license
- Original utility bill*
- Marriage certificate/Civil Partnership certificate
- Letter from head teacher or college principal (if under 19 years and still in full time education)

Documents marked with an * must be dated **within the last 3 months** and clearly show your current address.

The full list of acceptable documents will be provided to you if we wish to make you an offer of employment

NB Only original documents will be accepted; photocopies and online documents (e.g. bank statements, e- bills, eP60s etc.) cannot be accepted.

Please visit gov.uk for further information.

Is Security Clearance Required?

The level of security clearance is dependent on the location. As part of pre-employment checks, all roles will require Baseline Personal Security Standard (BPSS) as a minimum, and London-based roles require you to pass Counter Terrorism Check (CTC) clearance.

Information about the vetting process can be found at the following link: [United Kingdom Security Vetting - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

What nationality do I need to hold in order to apply?

To be eligible for employment you must be a national from the following countries: Open to the UK, Commonwealth and European Economic Area (EEA) and certain non-EEA nationals. This job is broadly open to the following groups:

- UK nationals
- Nationals of the Republic of Ireland
- Nationals of Commonwealth countries
- European Economic Area (EEA) nationals with (or eligible for) status under the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS)
- Relevant EEA or Turkish nationals working in the Civil Service
- Relevant EEA or Turkish nationals who have built up the right to work in the Civil Service, certain family members of the relevant (European Union) EU and Turkish nationals.

(*Commonwealth citizens not yet in the UK, who have no right of abode in the UK and who do not have leave to enter the UK are ineligible to apply)

For further information on whether you are eligible to apply, please visit Gov.UK.

Please take note that Defra does not hold a UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI) Skilled Worker License Sponsor and are unable to sponsor any individuals for Skilled Worker Sponsorship



Things you need to know

Counter Terrorism Clearance – London based Fellows

Counter Terrorism Clearance (CTC) is required if role involves unescorted access to 2 Marsham Street, our London office.

- CTC checks can take up to 36 working days.
- Your CTC checks cannot begin until you have passed the Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) process.
- You will be required to complete a further NSV application form on completion of the BPSS checks.

CTC checks include:

- A departmental/company records check which might include, for example personal files, staff reports, sick leave returns and security records
- A check of both spent and unspent criminal records
- A check of Security Service (MI5) records. If there are any unresolved security concerns about the individual or if recommended by the Security Service, the individual may also be interviewed.
- Your nationality and any periods of residence or connections overseas, especially in countries that the UK has more challenging relationships with.
- Criminal record checks for any countries you have resided in over the last 3 years. (It will be your responsibility to provide these records)

Further guidance on Counter Terrorism Checks is available in the links below.

[National Security Vetting - Clearance Levels](#)

[Vetting - Applicant Guidance](#)



Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles

Selection for appointment to the Civil Service is on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition, as outlined in the Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles.

The Civil Service Commission has two primary functions:

Providing assurance that selection for appointment to the Civil Service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.

Hearing and determining appeals made by Civil Servants under the Civil Service Code which sets out the Civil Service values – Honesty, Integrity, Impartiality and Objectivity.

More detailed information can be found at the Civil Service Commission website: [Civil Service Commission \(independent.gov.uk\)](http://civilservicecommission.independent.gov.uk)

Contact us

If you have any general queries or technical problems please email: RDF.Recruitment@defra.gov.uk This mailbox is monitored Mondays to Fridays between 9am and 5pm. Candidates can expect a response within 2 working days.

