



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Defra R&D Fellowship

Questions and Answers from the R&D fellowships webinar

Date: October 2024

Job Advert and Candidate Pack

Most questions can be answered by referring to the job advert and candidate pack at <https://defrajobs.co.uk/roles/research-and-development/>

Will Defra sponsor work visas for non-UK candidates?

No, 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. For further information on whether you are eligible to apply please see the candidate pack or visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationality-rules.

Civil Service Nationality Rules do not apply to secondments into the Civil Service given that in most cases the individual will remain an employee of their home organisation. The inward secondment of a foreign national must however comply with immigration rules.

Do I have need to be at a specific stage in my career to apply?

The fellowship would be most suited to early and mid-career applicants; however, we will assess all applications based on the relevant experience written in the personal statement.

Are the Fellowship start dates flexible?

Yes, we'll start onboarding Fellows from **1st April 2025** but exact start dates are flexible. Inform us of any time constraints if invited to interview and we will try to accommodate these for successful candidates. There are only two fixed dates within this programme – the **04th November 2024** for applications to be submitted and all fellowships must end before **30th March 2026**.

I won't have completed my postgraduate studies before wanting to start a fellowship. Can I still apply?

We will consider candidates that have proven experience in lieu of a postgraduate degree. If the end date of your postgraduate studies will be within a month of start date with Defra, we will accept a letter of recommendation from your tutor or supervisor. We would request that you are in a situation with your studies to take up the fellowship, we may on occasion allow you to delay the start of your fellowship, depending on the project you are allocated. The candidate pack provides further details of what constitutes equivalent experience.

Is there an option to pause my postgraduate studies to carry out the Fellowship?

We would encourage you to discuss this with your university as they would have to agree to allowing you to pause your studies. We will accept a letter of recommendation from your tutor or supervisor if you have not yet completed your postgraduate studies. However, you would need to demonstrate equivalent experience in lieu of a postgraduate degree.

Is it possible to do a fellowship part-time while completing a PhD?

If you fulfil the criteria of having completed post graduate degree or equivalent experience it may be possible, depending on the needs of the project. This can be discussed at interview.

What is a short term contract?

The Fellowships are offered as short term contracts. Short term appointments (STAs) are temporary appointments that meet short term business needs. Short term appointment or STA refers to a post where the individual does not need to be appointed on merit following fair and open competition. A short – term appointment is an on payroll contract with an end date. Unlike most Civil Servants STA contracts are issued to appointees whom have not been appointed on merit following a fair and open competition. It is possible to extend a STA contract up to 24 months, without further approval. STA appointees are not able to apply for other Civil Service vacancies that are advertised across government only, but may freely apply for posts advertised externally.

All fixed-term employees, i.e. FTA employees and STA employees, have the right not to be treated less favourably than comparable permanent employees on the grounds of their fixed-term status, unless that can be objectively justified.

What is a secondment?

The Fellowships are offered as short-term contracts, but we will consider a secondment on a case-by-case basis. A secondment is the temporary assignment of an employee from one organisation to another.

An individual from outside the Civil Service can come into a Civil Service organisation on an inward secondment for an agreed period of time, while remaining an employee of the organisation from which they are seconded. You will require your employer's approval and they would be reimbursed for your time.

The Civil Service Nationality Rules do not apply to the inward secondment given that in most cases the individual will remain an employee of their home organization. The inward secondment of a foreign national must comply with immigration rules. You may indicate in your application form if you would like to be considered for a secondment.

What is a loan?

Loans are different to secondments – a loan is the temporary transfer of a civil servant from one Civil Service organisation to another Civil Service organisation. Existing Civil Servants should consult their own department's policy on outward loans. If you are from a ALB, you will not be eligible for a loan, but maybe eligible for a secondment, please refer to the question above.

I don't have a PhD, can I apply?

Yes, we welcome application from candidates with a Masters qualification or demonstrable equivalent experience gained in any science, engineering, or analytical discipline. You may also apply if you are a chartered engineer or scientist registered by one of the professional institutions licensed by the Engineering Council or by the Science Council. Please see the candidate pack for more information.

What are the degree subject requirements for analytical fellowships?

The principal analytical professions are economics, social research, operational research, statistics and geography. For a wider overview of government analysis functions, see: <https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/about-us/membership/>

Subject requirements are specific to each profession. You should make sure you meet the subject requirements for one of the professions as detailed below:

- Economics: [Membership - Government Economic Service - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-economic-service/about-us/membership)
- Social research: [GSR – How to Apply | Civil Service Careers \(civil-service-careers.gov.uk\)](https://civil-service-careers.gov.uk/gsr-how-to-apply)
- Operational research: either a 2:1 or higher degree or degree apprenticeship in a highly numerate degree subject; or a 2:2 or higher degree and a highly numerate postgraduate degree
- Statistics: [Joining the GSS and GSG – Government Analysis Function \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](https://civilservice.gov.uk/working-for-us/joining-the-gss-and-gsg)

Note you will also need to meet the requirement outlined in the candidate pack of a postgraduate degree or equivalent experience to apply.

Is the length of my fellowship flexible?

We expect that the majority of fellowships will be 12 months between 1st April 2025 and 30th March 2026. The minimum term available would be 3-6 months however these will be by exception and subject to discussion with the project lead that you are matched with. Longer fellowships are more likely to maximise the benefits for both parties.

How many Fellowships are available?

Approximately 40.

Will I work in one policy area for the placement or across multiple?

In your application you will be invited to choose up to three preferred policy areas of interest. Successful candidates will be matched with one policy team on a specific R&D project, but you may work across multiple policy teams through your Fellowship depending on the nature of the project. You will be assigned a project in discussion with your policy team if successful at the interview stage.

How will the location of my placement be determined?

In your application you will be invited on the form to express your preferred location. Whilst locations are subject to negotiation, neither relocation costs nor provisions for housing will be made. If you are not near a location, you can still apply but are reminded that Defra's Office Occupancy policy requires that a minimum of 60% of working time should be from your Office Hub and with the expectation of no more than 40% of working time to be from home over a working month. Applicants are asked to consider if they can meet that commitment. Those invited to interview can discuss further and the successful candidate should discuss their specific circumstances with the hiring manager prior to accepting a formal job offer. During the matching stage we will be mindful of fellow's hub preference.

At what stage of the process are you told about the research project you have been matched up with? And what's the process if the candidate doesn't feel the project is a good match?

The project matching will occur after the interview stage, the matching process will try to assign you a project that aligns with your skills and experience. You will be given the opportunity to discuss the project you have been matched to ensure that it is the right fit for you before you accept the offer. If you do not feel that it is a good fit we can assess whether there are other projects that may fit better, but there is no guarantee you will be matched.

What is the application process?

The process is outlined in the application portal linked, including application process, and requirements for the role: <https://defrajobs.co.uk/vacancies/research-and-development-fellowships-2025/>

Which skills should I highlight in my application?

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, as well as natural and environmental scientists and engineers.

Your application 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.

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.

What is the difference between an Higher Executive Officer (HEO) role and Senior Executive Officer (SEO) role?

HEO and SEO are job grades used by civil service, using the information submitted in your application form we will assess which role would be the best fit based on your experience and skills.

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 to both peers and non-specialists.
- Evidence of being able to manage and prioritise your own workload.
- An ability to work effectively in a team environment.
- Experience of delivering sustained projects (such as research projects).

Additionally, 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.

What is the Specialist Skills Supplement? How do I qualify for it? Is it dependent on my qualifications or experience?

Specialist skills supplements apply for roles that require advanced scientific or analytical expertise and experience. There is some variation between professions in how eligibility is determined, and for analysts a second interview may be required to assess eligibility for the supplement.

Can I apply to the 2026/27 R&D Fellowship Programme?

We are inviting applications for the 2025/26 Fellowships programme and there is no guarantee that the programme will run in subsequent years.

Can past fellows re-apply to the R&D Fellowship Programme next year?

No, current or previous Defra R&D fellows are not eligible to apply.

What are the chances of continuing work at Defra after Fellowship ends? / Does completing the Fellowship lead to a permanent role at Defra?

We cannot commit to providing you a role at the end of the scheme. The aim of the fellowship programme is to provide firsthand experience working with government. The experience and skills developed during an R&D fellowship could provide useful examples to strengthen future applications.

Could I have more details on the specific projects being advertised?

Questions on specific projects and their details can be asked at interview stage.

I'm not sure this is the right programme for me, what other placement schemes are available at Defra?

Defra offers a variety of placements through the Civil Service Fast Stream from 6 to 8-week summer internships to 3-year STEM specific schemes. See www.faststream.gov.uk/summer-internship-programme and www.faststream.gov.uk.

Postgraduate students funded by UKRI, may apply for a 3 month placement within Defra through the UKRI Policy Internship Scheme. For more details and upcoming application dates. See www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/studentships-and-doctoral-training/get-training-and-development-to-support-your-doctorate/ukri-policy-internships/

Internships and short-term appointments are advertised on the Civil Service Jobs gateway so it's worth signing up for those alerts. Defra also run subject specific secondment calls on a needs basis, these are advertised through UPEN www.upen.ac.uk and university policy engagement teams.

For any outstanding questions please email rdf.recruitment@defra.gov.uk