Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Defra R&D Fellowship Programme

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.

Thank you for your interest in Defra's R&D Fellowship Programme.

Now entering its third year, I'm thrilled to be championing this exciting initiative.

As someone with an academic background, I deeply appreciate the value of connecting scientific and analytical expertise from academia and industry with government policy-making.

As an R&D Fellow, you'll play a vital role in embedding evidence-based thinking into decision-making processes. You'll be based within Defra's core teams, with opportunities to collaborate across our network of Arms-Length Bodies.

Together, we'll tackle a diverse portfolio of research and development challenges—spanning environmental sustainability, agriculture, biodiversity and more.

This programme is especially suited to early and mid-career researchers eager to see how science and analysis can directly shape public policy. However, we welcome applicants from all career stages and scientific disciplines who are passionate about applying their expertise to drive innovation and impact.

By joining us, you'll gain first-hand experience in translating scientific and analytical evidence into policy. You'll work in interdisciplinary teams, build networks across science, analysis, and policy, and develop valuable skills in communication, stakeholder engagement, and policy-making.

Whether your future lies in research, policy, or beyond, a Defra R&D Fellowship will empower you to use science and analysis to address complex challenges and ensure your work makes a meaningful difference.

I look forward to welcoming you to our team.

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Why join Defra?

Purpose

Our broad remit means we play a major role in people's day-to-day life, from the food we eat, and the air we breathe, to the water we drink.

We are here to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable.

Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, leaving it in a better state than we found it.

Priority outcomes

➢ Improve the environment through cleaner air and water, minimised waste, and thriving plant and terrestrial and marine wildlife
➢ Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon storage in the agricultural, waste, peat and tree planting sectors to help deliver net zero
➢ Reduce the likelihood and impact of flooding and coastal erosion on people, businesses, communities and the environment
➢ Increase the sustainability, productivity and resilience of the agriculture, fishing, food and drink sectors, enhance biosecurity at the border and raise animal welfare standards

More information about Defra can be found here:

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

25 Year Environment Plan - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Science and Analysis in Defra

Defra is an evidence-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, with over 500 in Core Defra, who provide policy makers with the economics, social science, statistics, operational research and other analysis needed to make effective policy.

You will apply to the fellowship as either as a scientist or an analyst – further information about these professions is on the following pages.

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Scientists in Defra, play a vital role in applying scientific knowledge, skills, and experience to inform government decision-making, shape policy development, and support operational delivery.

Defra use a wide range of scientific specialisms; more information can be found in pages 9-13.

They draw on technical expertise and communicate evidence clearly to non-specialists, including policymakers.

Their role involves contributing to the creation and application of knowledge to solve complex challenges, supporting the development of scientific capability across government, and engaging in cross-disciplinary collaboration and broad, strategic thinking to ensure robust, evidence-based solutions.

The role of an Analyst in Defra

Various professions sit within the Analysis function:

Operational Research (OR) is the discipline of applying advanced analytical methods to define, model and solve complex problems and make better decisions. OR analysts offer rigorous, objective and practical analytical support to decision makers, combining technical knowledge of modelling and statistics with skills and techniques for stakeholder engagement and consensus building. ORs apply different techniques to a broad range of projects, including forecasting, simulation modelling, machine learning, and quantitative methods for decision making like multi-criteria decision analysis.

Statisticians generally work in the collection, production and communication of official statistics. Government statisticians apply their skills to innovate in data management and analysis, utilizing various software and techniques to address complex challenges. They are also involved in improving statistical measurement and developing new data sources and methodologies.

Geographers collect, collate, manage and link administrative data by geographic reference to analyse impacts of government activity on different populations. Government Geographers integrate geographic data within wider analytical work and apply different specialist techniques to account for the geographic dimensions of the data. They use varied data visualisation techniques including cartography and geo-visualisation to present intelligence of complex geographic datasets.

Economists support analysis-driven decisions and inform and evaluate the implications of actions chosen. In government, economics helps identify the course of action that generates the highest value, with arguments backed by strong evidence and explicit weightings on both ethical considerations and expected outcomes. Typically, economists are skilled in cost benefit analysis, impact assessments, policy appraisal, forecasting and wider statistical analysis.

Social Researchers (SR) provide social research insight, advice and evidence to allow decision-makers to understand systems, processes and change associated with people, groups, organisations and society (their attitudes, perceptions, behaviours & intentions). SRs may have expertise in applied qualitative and quantitative design and analysis approaches, evaluation, and behavioural science; providing an understanding of 'what works, for whom, to what extent, in what contexts, how and why/why not?'

The R&D Fellowship Programme provides an exciting opportunity to join our team of scientists and analysts on a current or emerging policy issue.

During the application process you will be asked to choose up to 3 Defra areas that you would be interested in working in. More details can be found on pages 10-13.

If you are applying as an analyst, we'll require evidence of specialism in an analytical profession but won't expect you to have particular experience in any of the areas listed below. If you are applying as a scientist, a relevant topic specialism will be expected.

Central Analysis and Insights and cross-cutting analysis

Aim: To drive a multidisciplinary approach which produces cross-cutting strategic analysis and supports rest of Department through centres of excellence in social research (including evaluation), operational research (including modelling) and economic appraisal.

Key Focus areas: Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA), England's largest R&D programme assessing natural assets; Data Analytics and Science Hub (DASH), driving data transformation and science-informed policy. Analysis capacity, capability & credibility building; Data Analysis Response and resilience; Monitoring and evaluation; Social science of public perceptions; Modelling economic and environmental impacts.

Central Science

Aim: To drive innovation and systems thinking across Defra through strategic science, centres of excellence, and cutting-edge technologies.

Key Focus Areas: Strategy and innovation; Systems thinking; Centres of excellence (e.g. eDNA, Earth observation); Bioengineering; Science capacity and capability building.

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Agriculture, Food and Farming

Aim: To deliver a systems-based R&D programme that strengthens the agri-food sector through evidence-based advice, enhancing productivity, environmental outcomes, and resilience.

Key Focus Areas: Food security and resilience, Food authenticity, Sustainable agriculture and land use, Stakeholder engagement, Genetics and agroecology, Novel fertilisers, Modelling future schemes, Scientific underpinning of Environmental Land Management.

Animal and Plant Health and Welfare

Aim: To develop integrated science programmes that address domestic and global challenges in animal and plant health, ensuring Defra has the right evidence, capabilities, and expertise.

Key Focus Areas:

Animal Health and Welfare: Animal health and welfare, Exotic and zoonotic animal disease, livestock disease management, Aquatic animal disease management, Economic frameworks for disease control, Genomics, One Health approaches.
Plant Health: Plant, tree, and bee health, Plant varieties and seed policy, bio-surveillance networks, pest and disease management, plant precision breeding, eDNA/ surveillance for plant health.

International Biodiversity & Climate Change

Aim: To lead global efforts to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, supporting the Global Biodiversity Framework and sustainable development.

Key Focus Areas: International strategy and emerging markets, Biodiversity loss and climate change, Sustainable solutions and technologies, Monitoring biodiversity (plants, fungi), Illegal deforestation impacts, Environment Negotiations, Evidence reviews and science strategy.

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Natural Environment, Trees and Landscape

Aim: To provide expert scientific advice across the policy cycle for soils, peat, trees, and national biodiversity, ensuring evidence-based decision-making.

Key Focus Areas: Trees and national biodiversity, Soil and peat health, Statutory targets for species abundance, Reducing extinction risk, Net Zero contributions, Tree planting and peatland restoration.

Circular Economy

Aim: To advance evidence-based policy through strategic science and engineering, promoting reuse, repair, and sustainable growth.

Key Focus Areas: Improving circularity beyond recycling, Behavioural and societal change, Environmental and economic interlinkages, Circular economy's impact on GHG emissions.

Environment Strategy

Aim: Delivering science and analysis which informs the setting and monitoring of environmental plans. The directorate's overarching research priorities centre on advancing environmental protection.

Key Focus Areas: Tackling climate change through both mitigation and adaptation strategies, recognising and enhancing natural capital, enabling green finance initiatives, supporting resilient rural communities and understanding the patterns and impacts of land use while ensuring we can deliver Defra share of net zero. These objectives are underpinned by rigorous scientific research to monitor and evaluate changes in the natural environment, spatial data analysis, statistical analysis and data science.

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Environment Quality

Aim: To reduce pollution at source and protect public health and ecosystems, while enabling sustainable growth.

Key Focus Areas: Pollution pathways: sources to impacts, Chemicals, pesticides, hazardous waste, Air and noise pollution, Climate adaptation and resilience, Growth opportunities in environmental management.

Marine and Fisheries

Aim: To support UK fisheries and marine policy through robust science, monitoring, and evidence-based management.

Key Focus Areas: Fisheries science and management plans, Marine biodiversity and monitoring, Offshore wind and marine strategy, Marine protected areas, Pollution response and emergencies, Social research and evaluation.

Floods, Water and CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological & nuclear) Recovery

Aim: To manage water services, and the health of the water environment, flooding, and environmental recovery from chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear incidents.

Key Focus Areas: Water quality and provision, Water management, Flood research, Evidence compendiums and emergency response, CBRN environmental remediation.

Policy Response and Resilience Unit

Aim: To strengthen Defra's resilience by providing strategic oversight, coordination and policy interventions on cross-cutting and emerging risks. Enabling government to manage complex, urgent issues consistently.

Key Focus Areas: National and Economic Security (including cyber security), Readiness and Response, Biological Security Strategy, Pandemic Preparedness, Climate Security, Critical National Infrastructure, National Security Risk Assessment.

Examples of previous 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 | Circular Economy: 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 | Central Science Division: 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.

Rachel Lennon

My experience as an R&D fellow with Defra has been an incredible opportunity to gain valuable experience working in applied research in a policy context. My project is with the Data Analysis and Science Hub, where I am working in collaboration with the Environment Agency to develop an automated approach to monitoring wild salmon populations across the UK. This work feeds directly into policy for fisheries management and environmental monitoring, shaping how conservation approaches are implemented. Working at this intersection between scientific evidence generation and policy regulation has helped me to understand how Defra works and how best to develop and present scientific work for integration into policy. The incredible expertise and supportive environment within my team has allowed me to develop and enhance my skills in AI and machine learning, with direct application to real world monitoring which will make a real difference to protecting environmental systems.

My line manager has been extremely supportive and encouraging, allowing me to explore the landscape of environmental monitoring across Defra and its Arm Lengths Bodies (ALBs), exposing me to new teams and projects working in the field. This opportunity to network with a diverse and brilliant team has really made this time at Defra exciting and has allowed me to build valuable connections across the department.

Clemency White

My research looks into the interactions between sharks and the sounds of their environments.

After finishing my PhD, I was undecided if I wanted to continue a career in academia or move into policy work. I was incredibly excited to join the Marine & Fisheries Directorate in the 25/26 R&D cohort to have the opportunity to work in an area of policy related to my academic background. In my role, I've been able to take leading role on a project that synthesises existing evidence to inform current policy objectives within a brilliant team of people across government agencies, public bodies and universities. It has given me an excellent opportunity to see how the government-science interface operates in practice, make new connections, and apply my subject knowledge to make an impact.

My highlights to date include being invited to an expert working group meeting to help conceptualise new policy, taking courses in topics across disciplines (e.g., environmental economics, writing for government) and visiting government agencies with the R&D cohort to see the breadth of work Defra undertakes. My experience has given me excellent insight into how science and government work together and has equipped me to move into the next stage of my career as a more well-rounded scientist, whether it is in the civil service or in academia.

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Rorie Beswick-Parsons

Since completing my PhD in 2018, I have worked as a Research Associate across a range of research projects, both collaboratively and independently. Over this time, I have become increasingly aware of the importance of impact - both professionally and personally - in contributing to and informing current understanding of some of our most pressing societal challenges. The Research and Development Fellowship offered by Defra presents an exceptional opportunity to work at the forefront of policy and gain invaluable experience in communicating and translating research into a policy context.

I am currently based in the Circular Economy Directorate, working with the Social Research and Behavioural Insights team. My project builds on my academic experience of researching circular economy transitions from a citizen engagement perspective. I am leading a citizen behaviour evidence review to support the implementation of the Collection and Packaging Reforms. This work aims to identify household practices related to recycling behaviour - whether previously considered or not - and explore further behavioural interventions to enhance policy impact. The project has deepened my understanding of the types of scientific and robust evidence that are most valuable in informing policy. It has also allowed me to develop stakeholder engagement skills within Defra, strengthening my ability to introduce, communicate, and disseminate the project across the directorate.

Beyond this, I have contributed to several other team tasks and activities, which has provided a more rounded experience of a civil service role at Defra. These opportunities have enabled me to collaborate with colleagues and experience fast-paced, time-sensitive requests that support wider policy developments. Additionally, my interest in exploring civil service roles more broadly has led me to join one Defra's specialist professions. Becoming a member of the Social Research Group has connected me with a wider community of colleagues across the department and offered valuable insight into how social research roles operate across different directorates and teams.

This fellowship has been an invaluable opportunity to apply my skills and knowledge in a government and policy setting. It has challenged me to adapt my approach as a social scientist - particularly in how I synthesise and communicate research - which will benefit me whether I continue in academia or transition into the civil service in the future.

Location, Contract Type and Reasonable Adjustments

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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 an Arms Lengths Body (ALB).

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 ALBs and are based at an ALB's 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 (STA) 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 2026, but we can offer flexibility about start date and duration on a case-by-case basis, with a minimum of 6 months duration. Fellowships are available on a full time or part time basis. Our Fellowship contracts will end before 30th March 2027. 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.

STA appointees and secondees are not eligible to apply for internal Civil Service vacancies that are advertised across government departments. However, they may apply for externally advertised roles that are open to the public.

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 interviews, 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.

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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, operational researchers, geographers, 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 2026, 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

- Proven equivalent experience in a relevant science, engineering, or analytical discipline, demonstrated through conducting or applying research or analysis as a subject matter expert in the chosen area of specialism.

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

Minimum of 25 days Annual Leave

Staff Recognition Schemes

Bicycle Loan

Season Ticket Loan

Employee Discounts

Staff Wellbeing

Learning and Development

Give as You Earn

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Defra offers an attractive and competitive benefits package, including:

Salary
Starting Salary: HEO National: £33,590; HEO London: £37,480; SEO National: £41,220; SEO London: £44,500. 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
The majority of new entrants to the Civil Service are eligible to join the Civil Service Pension Scheme. There are exceptions to this, where the employee has previously been a member of the Civil Service Pension Scheme and received benefits from the Scheme, however you will receive a Pension Choices pack to complete which will ask you about previous service.

If you have previously been a member of the Civil Service Pension Scheme and are unsure whether you will be eligible to rejoin, you can contact MyCSP to discuss on 0300 123 6666.

If you leave the Civil Service with more than 3 months but less than 2 years' service, you have the option of either:
- a refund of the contributions you have paid, or
- a transfer out to another pension provider

Civil Service Pensions will contact you directly with your options once they have received formal notification from Defra that you have left service.

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.

Flexible Working
Flexible working patterns including job share.

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Defra offers an attractive and competitive benefits package, continued:

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.

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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 (www.gov.uk)
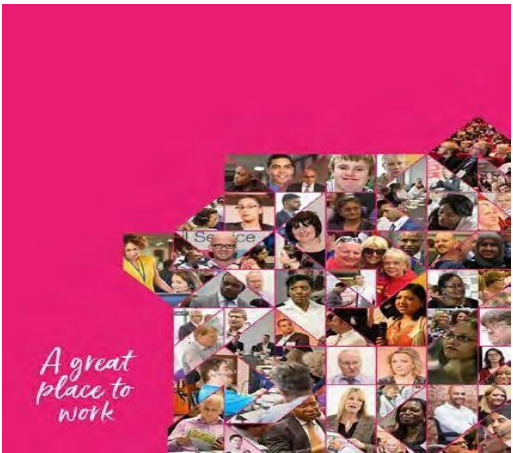
As a Disability Confident employer, we positively welcome applications from disabled people. We are committed to making workplace adjustments wherever possible to ensure that disabled people can participate fully, not only in the recruitment and selection process, but when they are appointed into their 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.

Respect   Include   Support   Engage

A great place to work

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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)

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 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

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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

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How to apply

Your application should be submitted through our online form.

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.

Please note current and previous fellows are not eligible to reapply to the programme.

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 a 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. Analysts will undergo a second professions specific interview.

Data privacy statement

Please see our data privacy statement which explains how Defra will collect and use your personal data.

Ready to shape the future of environmental research?

If you're passionate about Science, Analysis, innovation and impact, apply now for the **Defra R&D Fellowship Programme 2026/27**.

Defra R&D Fellowships 2026/27 Application Form

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Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence can be a useful tool to support your application. However, all examples and statements must be truthful, factually accurate, and based on your own experience. Plagiarism - including presenting others' ideas or AI-generated content as your own - may result in withdrawal of applications or disciplinary action for internal candidates. Please refer to our candidate guidance for more information on appropriate and inappropriate use.
Artificial intelligence and recruitment, Civil Service Careers

Working for the Civil Service

The Civil Service Code (opens in a new window) sets out the standards of behaviour expected of civil servants.

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.