Scottish Parliament Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Scottish Parliament Academic Fellowship Scheme 2026/27

International comparisons of enterprise agencies

The Scottish Parliament regularly scrutinises the work of Scotland's three enterprise agencies: Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise.

The purpose of this fellowship is to provide information about similar agencies in comparable countries and jurisdictions, to aid parliamentary scrutiny.

The research would seek to identify similarities and differences in areas such as budgets, staffing levels, governance arrangements, strategic priorities, powers and responsibilities, economic development priorities, and reported outcomes and impacts.

Particular interest lies in understanding how small advanced economies and devolved or regional administrations organise economic development functions and support business growth, innovation, inward investment and regional development.

Potential comparators might include countries such as Ireland, Denmark, Finland, Norway and New Zealand, together with devolved or regional administrations such as Wales, Northern Ireland, Flanders, the Basque Country, or selected Canadian provinces. Applicants are welcome to propose alternative comparators and explain why they would provide useful insights for Scotland.

The goal is not to identify a single "best" model or to make policy recommendations. Rather, the intention is to provide an evidence base which helps contextualise Scotland's current arrangements and informs parliamentary scrutiny of Scotland's enterprise agencies.

What will the work involve?

Whilst we are happy to discuss approaches, and indeed scope, we envisage that the work could involve:

- A comparative overview of enterprise agencies in a small number of countries or regions which provide useful comparators for Scotland.
- A review of the role, powers and governance arrangements of the selected agencies, including:
    - statutory basis and legal powers
    - governance and accountability arrangements
    - relationships with national, regional and local government
    - strategic objectives and priorities
    - organisational responsibilities and areas of activity.

- A comparison of organisational resources and activities, including:
    - annual budgets and expenditure
    - staffing levels and organisational structures
    - business growth and productivity programmes
    - innovation and research and development support
    - inward investment and trade promotion activities
    - entrepreneurship and start-up support
    - regional development and place-based interventions.
- A comparison of performance and outcomes, including:
    - performance measures and targets
    - reported outcomes and impacts
    - evaluation and impact assessment approaches
    - evidence relating to effectiveness and value for money
    - strengths, limitations and critiques identified in academic and policy literature.
- Benchmarking Scotland's enterprise agencies against the selected comparators, highlighting key similarities and differences in governance, funding, staffing, strategic direction, activities and performance.

The above is intended as an initial overview of potential options and areas of focus. We are open to discussing alternative approaches which would meet the same broad objective of providing an evidence-based comparison of Scotland's enterprise agencies with comparable organisations elsewhere.

Outputs

SPICe expects that a briefing and/or a blog post (or series of blog posts) will be published on the Scottish Parliament website setting out the findings of this research.

The fellow may also have the opportunity to present findings to a parliamentary committee, most likely the Economy Tourism and Energy Committee.

SPICe also hosts a series of breakfast seminars which are designed to be of interest to all Members of the Scottish Parliament and Parliamentary staff. The outputs from this project may be presented at a breakfast seminar.

Experience needed

- Strong research skills and the ability to communicate complex information to a non-specialist audience.
- Expertise in economic development, regional economics, public policy, economic geography, public administration, business policy, or a related discipline.
- Familiarity with enterprise agencies, economic development organisations, or wider economic development policy.
- Note that we are also open to joint fellowships where each fellow brings expertise relating to a different country, region or policy area. Such applications should explain each applicant's role and how the work would be managed jointly. Applicants must also have the right to work in the UK.
- An understanding of the political sensitivities around economic development policy and the importance of political impartiality. In that regard, we are looking for a candidate or candidates who can provide an objective assessment of different models and approaches rather than advocate for a particular approach.

Timescale

We anticipate at this stage that the work could begin in February 2027 with the aim of being completed by the end of June 2027, with final outputs being published in September 2027.

Our initial expectation is that this work would involve on average around one day per week. The work can, however, be carried out in a single block or in blocks within the proposed start and end dates. The work can also take place in Parliament or remotely, with the presentation of final outputs taking place in person.

Funding

It is up to the prospective fellow and their academic institution to set out the basis on which their costs are determined and the sources of their funding.

Although funding cannot be guaranteed, the Parliament does have a limited budget which it can potentially use to fund or part-fund fellows (previously, funding provided has typically been between £3,000 and £4,000). We can discuss funding in more detail with applicants once applications have been submitted and assessed.

Further information

Please contact Rob Watts in SPICe if you wish to discuss further (rob.watts@parliament.scot).