

Guide to the Scottish Parliament Academic Fellowship Scheme

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1. Introduction to the Scheme and key points

The purpose of the Scottish Parliament is to hold the Scottish Government to account, to scrutinise legislation and to represent the people of Scotland by debating issues of national importance.

The Scheme enables academics to work on projects with the Parliament in support of this purpose.

The scheme aims to:

1. Provide the Parliament with specialised resources which allow it to undertake and communicate analysis which would otherwise not be possible
2. Increase the use of academic knowledge, skills and research within the Parliament
3. Promote knowledge and understanding of the Parliament within the academic sector.

The scheme is managed by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe). Parliamentary fellowships will usually be hosted by SPICe. SPICe provides impartial analysis and information to MSPs of all political parties and to parliamentary committees, often to short deadlines.



If you have any queries about how the scheme works or how it might apply to a proposed project, please email academia@parliament.scot

Key Points about the Scheme

Who are we looking for?

- The scheme is open to academics from all disciplines, including those at an early stage in their career.
- We normally expect candidates to have a PhD and to be working within an academic institution. Candidates without a PhD and post-doctoral experience, or who aren't working in an academic institution, will only be taken on in exceptional cases where they can demonstrate significant experience in their field.
- Applicants must also have the right to work in the UK.
- We aim to advertise annually in the spring. However, we have to respond to political needs and may also advertise projects when the need arises.
- Fellows may apply to work on:
  - a project specified by the Parliament (Stream 1); or
  - a project they propose themselves (Stream 2 - the open call).
- The application deadlines will be stated in each advert.
- To apply for projects proposed by the Parliament (Stream 1), applicants need to fill in our online application form and submit project details and a CV.
- In contrast, applicants for the open call (Stream 2) only need to submit a one-page document outlining a proposed project plus a CV.
- Joint applications (normally no more than three applicants) are possible, although such applications will need to explain each applicant's role and experience and how the project will be managed jointly.
- Further guidance on how to apply will be placed on our Academic Fellowship webpages closer to the time of any calls for applications.
- Once we have received applications we will consider if the project might be of interest and, if so, will contact the applicant to discuss in more detail.
- Interviews will be held if an application is of interest and successful applicants will be appointed based on the terms in our standard Fellowship Agreement.
- Fellows remain employed by their university or institution and are not employed by the Parliament whilst carrying out a fellowship.
- Successful applicants need to receive security clearance from the Parliament before starting their fellowship.

What kind of projects are we looking for in the open call?

We are looking for projects which have clear relevance to current or future parliamentary business and the general aims behind the fellowship scheme. In short,



something where your research could be of relevance to the Parliament and the key political issues and public policies of the day.

Our blogpost "The Scottish Parliament Academic Fellowship Scheme – what's it all about?" includes a summary of all the previous fellowships and should give a good idea of the type of projects which could be of interest to us.

What kind of work do academic fellows normally do?

The general focus of your work will be agreed at the outset – this will include work on a specific project.

We would normally expect you to:

- Produce a SPICe output (normally a short SPICe briefing and a blog) separate to any academic publications you produce.
- Present your work internally in the Parliament (e.g. to a parliamentary committee or at a seminar or other event).
- Be part of a community of academics who can feed into the Parliament's engagement work in the future.

What are the normal working arrangements?

Each fellowship will be different. However, the typical arrangement is:

- Part time, remote or partially remote working for one or two days a week.
- Projects lasting between six months to a year.

What is the policy on funding?

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

The Parliament has a finite budget which it can use to fund or part-fund fellows. Funding provided per project is typically in the range of £3,000-£4,000. However, funding from the Parliament cannot be guaranteed for every proposal.

Therefore, when applying, we would encourage applicants to also consider funding sources from within their institutions or from other sources. The sources of funding and amount needed (if any) should be noted in the application.

For more details see the answers to the FAQs below



2. Frequently Asked Questions

a. What is the application process?

Stream 1

The specific details of individual projects proposed by us (Stream 1) will be publicised on our website and through other channels when we post a call for applications.

To apply for Stream 1 projects, applicants need to fill in an online application form **and** send us project details and a CV.

The application form requires applicants to provide details of matters such as: funding for the fellowship; experience of presenting work in a non-academic context; proposed working arrangements; and confirmation that the Head of Department (or equivalent) approves the application.

In addition to the application form and cv, applicants for Stream 1 projects also need to email a separate two-page document outlining the details of their project. Project details should include: aims and objectives of the project: the research approach proposed: a timetable with milestones; risks; outputs; and proposed communication of findings from the project.

Stream 2

The application process for the open call is more streamlined as it is a more speculative process.

Applicants for the open call need to e-mail a one-page document outlining a proposed project, and also a CV. The one-page document should include the minimum of the following information:

- A short overview of what the project might entail and what its general aims and objectives are.
- Why the project is relevant to parliamentary business and the aims behind the fellowship scheme
- A general feel for the likely timetable of the research and possible outputs.

More detailed guidance on the application process for Stream 1 and Stream 2 projects will be posted on our website when the call for applications is made.



b. What is the process for joint applications?

We understand that many academics carry out research jointly and we welcome joint applications. However, to ensure that the process does not become unwieldy we will normally not accept joint applications by more than three people (exceptions to this principle may, however, be made for specific projects). Joint applications will also need to explain each applicant's role and experience and how the project will be managed jointly. Information for each applicant will also have to be included in the online application form for Stream 1 projects.

c. Is it possible to discuss ideas for projects before submitting an application?

We are keen to keep the process open and transparent. Therefore, we are not able to discuss submissions in detail with applicants in advance of the deadline. In the interests of fairness, we cannot give an unfair advantage to one applicant over others. However, we are happy to give general guidance on the process and our expectations to applicants to help them in their application, and to help people decide whether or not to apply. We may also run online events in advance of the deadline for applications to explain the application process and to briefly discuss Stream 1 proposals.

d. What happens after applications are submitted?

After the deadline for applications, the following activities will take place:

- A panel will assess the applications (where necessary, involving an external expert).
- Interviews will be held either online or in person.
- The outcome of interviews will be notified to applicants.
- Individual fellowships will be negotiated with successful applicants.
- Successful applicants must also undergo security vetting. Fellowships cannot begin until security clearance has been obtained. This can take up to six weeks. Individual fellowships will be based on the standard terms and conditions posted on our website which include requirements in relation to matters such as confidentiality, intellectual property in the work carried out, as well as fellows' conduct.
- Fellows will also be asked to sign a Fellowship Agreement which will include further details on the specific project such as working hours, funding, project outcomes etc. The Fellowship Agreement will be based on our standard terms and conditions which we will post on our website.
- We will provide an induction for successful applicants which will include



practical training in the style of writing we expect when drafting briefings for SPICe.

- Fellows will be assigned a supervisor within SPICe who will provide support and guidance during the fellowship.
- Where we advertise a call in the spring, we normally expect that fellows will be able to start work in the Parliament's summer recess or shortly thereafter and to publish their work before the next summer recess.
- Where we advertise a call in the autumn, we normally expect that fellows will be able to start work at the start of the new year or shortly thereafter and to publish their work either before the next summer recess or shortly thereafter.

It is important to note that fellows remain employed by their university or institution and are not employed by the Parliament whilst carrying out a fellowship.

More information on the assessment criteria will be posted on our website at the time that the call for applications is made.

e. What are the eligibility requirements?

a) The scheme is open to academics from all subject areas and disciplines, including those at an early stage in their career.
b) However, applicants normally need to have a PhD in a relevant area of study.
c) Applicants must, in principle, be working within an academic institution. You must seek permission from your academic institution and/or employer before applying for Stream 1. Our application form for Stream 1 applications requires you to confirm that your head of department, or equivalent, consents to your application.
d) Candidates without a PhD and post-doctoral experience, or who aren't working in an academic institution, will only be taken on in exceptional cases where they can demonstrate significant experience in their field.
e) There are no eligibility rules based on years of post-doctoral experience. The fellowship is therefore one which would suit early career researchers as well as other academics. However, the level of experience is one of the factors which we take into account when assessing applications.
f) Applicants must also have the right to work in the UK and will need to receive security clearance from the Parliament to take on a fellowship.

f. What kind of projects are we looking for in the open call?

We are looking for projects which have clear relevance to current or future parliamentary business and the general aims behind the fellowship scheme. In short, something where your research could be of relevance to the Parliament and the key political issues and public policies of the day.

Our blogpost "The Scottish Parliament Academic Fellowship Scheme – what's it all about?" includes a summary of all the previous fellowships and should give a good



idea of the type of projects which could be of interest to us.

As outlined in the blogpost, work has ranged across disciplines and policy areas covering both narrow and wider areas of research. This includes both secondary and primary research as well as research aimed at improving parliamentary processes.

When considering whether a project might be a good fit for a fellowship it is also important to remember that:

1. **The Scottish Parliament only has the power to legislate in devolved areas.** We can't therefore deal with projects which are purely focused on areas reserved to the UK Parliament (there needs to be a devolved element of policy).
2. **The Scottish Parliament isn't the Scottish Government.** The Scottish Government is responsible for formulating and implementing policy whereas the Parliament is responsible for legislating, and also scrutinising the work of the Scottish Government. Projects which have too much of a focus on policy formulation itself and the work of the Scottish Government or other government agencies are therefore less likely to be of interest.
3. **Timing can be important.** Some projects can be relevant irrespective of timing (certain issues are of general relevance). However, some research may lose its relevance if not completed within a certain period. For example, if a proposal is focused on legislation which is expected to be introduced, then it is important that the project's timing is aligned with the likely legislative timetable. Similarly, proposals in relation to post-legislative scrutiny are less likely to be relevant where the legislation in question has only just come into force.

g. What kind of work do fellows do?

The general focus of your work will be agreed at the outset – this will include work on a specific project. In particular, we would normally expect you to:

- Produce a SPICe output (normally a short SPICe briefing and a blog) separate to any academic publications you produce based on your work with us.
- Present your work internally in the Parliament (e.g. to a parliamentary committee or at a seminar or other event).
- Be part of a community of academics who can feed into the Parliament's engagement work in the future.

The exact outputs needed will, however, be agreed on at the outset of the project.

In addition, as parliamentary business can be varied and fast changing, we would also expect you to take a flexible approach to ensure your work has the greatest



impact. SPICe researchers may also ask for advice within your area of expertise, for example in producing committee papers or answering enquiries.

Working within SPICe, you would be expected to operate in an impartial manner and in partnership with a SPICe researcher.

For further information on the kind of outputs which previous fellows have produced see our blogpost "The Scottish Parliament Academic Fellowship Scheme – what's it all about?

h. How long do fellowships last?

In general terms, fellowships normally last between six months and a year, although there can sometimes be scope to extend them where work has been completed successfully.

Indicative timescales for Stream 1 projects will be included in the information on each individual project which we post on our website. The exact timescales will, however, be discussed and agreed with the successful applicant and their academic institution.

It is important that the timescale for the project takes into account the needs of the Scottish Parliament, as some research may lose its relevance if not completed within a certain period. Proposals for Stream 2 (the open call) should in particular consider the extent to which the timing for the proposed project is likely to fit with the needs of the Parliament.

i. What is the policy on flexible working and how many days a week is a fellowship normally?

Although there will be situations where work is necessary in the Parliament building, we are aware that many academics will not be situated near the Parliament and welcome people working remotely from their own institution.

We also welcome applicants who wish to work part-time on a project. In practice, the majority of fellows work on a part-time basis, for example working on their fellowship project one to two days a week.

The precise working arrangements for each fellowship will, however, depend on the scope of the project as some projects may need more work than others, or may need more work at certain times during the project.

In addition, although we welcome remote working, there can be advantages in working in the Parliament (even if only for a short period of time) in order to get a rounded experience of the parliamentary environment. We therefore also welcome those who want to work in the Parliament building, even if only from time to time.



Preferred working arrangements should be proposed in your application. We will agree working arrangements on a case-by-case basis.

j. What are the benefits of becoming an academic fellow?

Overall, we aim to give you a rich and rounded experience of the parliamentary environment. Potential benefits from becoming a fellow include:

- Increased knowledge and understanding of Parliament and the political process.
- Research impact – e.g. by your research being part of Parliament's scrutiny processes.
- Increased experience of writing for and presenting your work to politicians and lay people
- Publications – e.g. peer reviewed articles based on your research.
- A larger network – e.g. among parliamentarians, Parliament staff and other academics.
- New career avenues and research agendas.

k. What is the policy on funding?

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

The Parliament has a finite budget which it can use to fund or part-fund fellows. Funding provided per project is typically in the range of £3,000-£4,000. However, funding from the Parliament cannot be guaranteed for every proposal.

Therefore, when applying, we would encourage applicants to also consider funding sources from within their institutions or from other sources (for example impact or knowledge exchange funding from research councils). The sources of funding and amount needed (if any) should be noted in the application.

l. How does the contract work?

Individual fellowships will be based on our standard terms and conditions posted on our website which include requirements in relation to matters such as confidentiality, intellectual property in the work carried out, as well as fellows' conduct. Fellows are appointed on the basis of these standard terms.

Fellows and universities will also be asked to sign a Fellowship Agreement which will include further details on the specific project such as working hours, funding, project outcomes etc. These details will be negotiated with the individual fellow and university.



m. Ethics approval

Fellowship projects can sometimes involve ethical issues, for example, linked to the collection of data from participants including parliamentarians and parliament staff. Where this is the case, fellows are responsible for obtaining ethics approval from the appropriate body (most likely their university) before carrying out the research.