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, which has been in place since 2017, is managed by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe). Parliamentary fellowships will usually be hosted by SPICe.

Key Points about the Scheme

- The scheme is open to academics from all disciplines, including those at an early stage in their career.
- However, we normally expect candidates to have a PhD and be working within an academic institution. Candidates without a PhD and post-doctoral experience 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.
- Work can often be carried out remotely through e-mail, video-conferencing etc. However, this depends on the project and there will be projects where elements of work in the Parliament building will be necessary.
- The scheme works on a rolling basis and calls for projects are issued and publicised on our website and through other channels as and when the need arises.
- Fellows may apply to work on:
  - ➢ a project specified by the Parliament (usually referred to as Stream 1); or
  - ➢ a project they propose themselves (usually referred to as Stream 2 - the open call).
- The deadlines will be stated in each advert
- To apply for projects proposed by us (stream 1), applicants need to fill in our online application form **and** send us project details and a cv.
- In contrast, applicants for the open call (stream 2) only need to send us a one-page document outlining a proposed project plus a cv.
- Joint applications by a limited number of applicants (normally no more than three) 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 individual fellowships will be negotiated with successful applicants based on 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 will also need to receive security clearance from the Parliament in order to take on a fellowship.
- If you have any queries about how the scheme works or how it might apply to a proposed project, please email academia@parliament.scot

2. Frequently Asked Questions

a. What do academic fellows do?

Academic fellows are usually hosted in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe). SPICe provides impartial analysis and information to MSPs of all political parties and to parliamentary committees, often to short deadlines.

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 written 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 in partnership with a SPICe researcher.

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

b. What are the eligibility requirements?

a) Applicants will normally have completed a PhD in a relevant area of study. There are no eligibility rules based on years of post-doctoral experience, however, the level of experience will be a factor taken into account in our assessment of your application.

b) Candidates without a PhD and post-doctoral experience will only be taken on in exceptional cases where they can demonstrate significant experience in their field.

c) The scheme is open to academics from all subject areas and disciplines.

d) 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.

e) Applicants must also have the right to work in the UK and will need to receive security clearance from the Parliament in order to take on a fellowship.

c. What are the timescales for fellowships?

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 on with the successful applicant and their academic institution.

In general 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 therefore consider the extent to which the timing for the proposed project is likely to fit with the needs of the Parliament.

d. What is the policy on flexible working?

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.

The precise working arrangements for each fellowship will, however, depend on the scope of the project as some projects may need more work in the Parliament than others. In addition, 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.

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

e. 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 does, however, have a limited budget which it can use to fund or part-fund fellows (funding provided is typically in the range of £3-4,000).

Parliamentary funding can, however, not be guaranteed and, 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.

f. 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 2-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 will be required 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 at the time that the call for applications is made.

g. What is the process for joint applications?

We understand that many academics carry out research jointly and 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.

h. 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.

i. 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.
- The outcome of interviews will be notified to applicants.
- Individual fellowships will be negotiated with successful applicants.
- Fellows will be asked to sign our Fellowship Agreement which includes details of the project requirements and intellectual property in the work carried out, as well as requirements on conduct, health and safety and the use of IT.
- Successful applicants must undergo also security vetting. Fellowships cannot begin until security clearance has been obtained. This can take up to six weeks.
- 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.

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.

j. 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.