

ESRC Policy Fellowships 2021: Opportunity description

Fellowship Title: FCDO Foreign Policy and Disinformation

Host department: [Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office](#)

Host team: The Open Source Unit

The FCDO Fellowships are funded jointly by AHRC and ESRC, and open to researchers from social science, arts and humanities disciplines.

Summary: Foreign Policy fellowship with focus on disinformation in the context of international geopolitics

Policy topic: Foreign Policy

Potentially relevant academic disciplines: International Relations, Area Studies, Data Science, Behavioural Science, Psychology, Communications

Relevant research career stage: No preference – open to early or mid-career

Practical details

Start of 3-month inception phase: December 2021

Length of core placement: 12 months

FTE for core placement (range): 0.6 - 1

Location requirements: As well as remote working, Fellows will be required to spend time physically in the FCDO building in central London (subject to the easing to COVID 19 restrictions). Ways and patterns of working will be established in the inception phase. Many FCDO staff work flexibly.

Necessary level of security clearance: [Security Check](#) (SC) level. We would ask the person taking up the fellowship opportunity to start the SC application process as soon as their Fellowship has been confirmed by ESRC, ideally before the inception phase begins. See [National security vetting: clearance levels - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and additional information section below.

Any additional requirements: The secondees will be required to observe the provisions of the [Civil Service Code](#) and Diplomatic Service Code and the Official Secrets Act 1989:

Detailed description

The Open Source Unit works to transform how the FCDO and our partners use open source analysis to understand the world we operate in, to enhance policy making, respond to international events and to evidence our impact. The Unit undertakes a mix of primary and secondary research and brings together complimentary sub-teams, including on behavioural science, data science and regional disinformation/media expertise.

A successful fellow would provide advice on a range of topics to support colleagues alongside a primary focus on a project to support the development of frameworks to assess and prioritise areas of concern. Specific research questions might include i) the impact of disinformation on specific real world behaviours, ii) what works in building resilience to disinformation, iii) exploring effective responses to disinformation.

The OSU's data collection activities are subject to a strict compliance framework that limits our monitoring to activity that has an international facing element. The Unit also abides by commercial licencing agreements and the FCDO's obligations under data protection law -

Please see below additional information on working in the FCDO, and information on the security clearance and code of conduct.

Opportunity-specific person specification

Applications will be assessed against the following opportunity-specific requirements in addition to the generic eligibility and call criteria.

Skills/ expertise:

- Deep subject matter expertise on disinformation in the context of international geopolitics and with awareness of UK foreign policy'

Additional information

About the FCDO

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) was created in 2020 from the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the Department for International Development.

The FCDO pursues our national interests and projects the UK as a force for good in the world. We promote the interests of British citizens, safeguard the UK's security, defend our values, reduce poverty and tackle global challenges with our international partners.

We employ around 17,300 staff in our diplomatic and development offices worldwide, including in 280 overseas embassies and high commissions. Our UK-based staff work in King Charles Street or 22 Whitehall, London, and Abercrombie House, East Kilbride. We also have staff based in Milton Keynes.

Working in the FCDO

The FCDO unites development and diplomacy in one new department. These fellowships sit more in the diplomatic than the development sphere but the two are closely linked.

We have highly specialised and unique research requirements and operate in a world where having access to high-quality evidence-based analysis can mean the difference between success and failure. But we also operate in a world of nuance and subtlety where exerting influence, negotiating and leveraging others' power at precisely the right moment is at a premium. Timing is always key. This makes it difficult for academics operating outside to have a significant impact. Academics often have the best ideas; but these ideas are seldom injected into policy at the right moment. Working in close proximity to and in tight interaction with FCDO policymakers can help change this, providing opportunities to influence and to challenge. Whilst no one can guarantee that the approaches and recommendations made by academics will shape UK foreign policy, bringing academic expertise directly into the heart of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office through this scheme enhances the chances of creating meaningful impact on British diplomacy.

The FCDO is a friendly and supportive place to work and many staff have flexible working patterns. Fellows are fully integrated into the FCDO's structure and are placed within a policy team which could be geographic or thematic as well as within a research and analysis focussed team, for example the Research Analysts Cadre whose analysts are usually in place for years, or even decades. Fellows have a line manager and additional support and mentoring will be provided. This blog by a former Fellow and a former Head of Research Analysts gives a sense of some of the challenges of straddling the FCDO and academic work.

Work-planning is a mixture of demand and self-tasking based on evolving FCDO needs. An indicative list of tasks includes: writing papers and shorter notes, oral briefings for senior officials and ministers,

meeting external and cross-Whitehall partners, research visits overseas as well as organising and running masterclasses. The ability to communicate clearly and succinctly, highlighting policy relevance to non-experts is of importance to all FCDO work. So too is the ability to work collaboratively with others and to do so at pace, sometimes delivering to tight deadlines. For all Fellowships we seek a 12-month placement period.

Security clearance

For security reasons, and in line with FCDO policy, successful applicants have to be security cleared before the offer of the fellowship placement can be confirmed. The level of security clearance required for these fellowships is Security Check. While UK nationality is not essential, applicants need to have a minimum of two years residence, including 12 months of continuous residence in the UK in the preceding five years. Dual nationality is not in itself a barrier but potential applicants with close ties to the area on which they would be working, or who are not UK nationals, should contact the FCDO (Personnel Security Team, ESD.PST@fcdo.gov.uk) before applying since there may be security limitations which would prevent them from accessing the necessary material. Loss of clearance during the fellowship period, for example, due to personal conduct, will risk termination of the secondment. All security clearance decisions are personal to the applicant and depend on a range of factors.

Code of conduct

As an additional condition to the standard fellowship terms and conditions, the fellows will need to agree to respect the FCDO's values and standards of behaviour; failure to do so may result in the termination of the fellowship. Fellows will also be obliged to respect the provisions of the Official Secrets Act and observe the duties of propriety and confidentiality during and after the fellowship period. This means consulting the FCDO before undertaking activities involving: (a) the disclosure of UK Government official information; and (b) the publication or disclosure of material liable to affect the Government's relations with other countries. An FCDO-nominated contact will be responsible for the sensitivity review of all publications prior to their submission for publication. However, the fellows will not be obliged to make amendments to the content unless publications contain information that it is in breach of the Official Secrets Act (as laid out in the Civil Service Code), or a confidentiality agreement, or which could disclose sensitive, classified and/or personal information, or which could affect the Government's relations with other countries. The agreement to be signed by Fellows, their research organisations and the FCDO will include the above matters.