

# Innovation Fellowships Scheme 2026-27, Route B Policy-led Scheme Guidance Notes

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## Contents

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1	Aims and Purpose of the Scheme.....	3
2	Features of the Scheme.....	4
3	Applying to the Scheme.....	4
4	Eligibility.....	5
5	Employing Institution Eligibility.....	6
6	Person Specification.....	6
7	General Requirements and Expectations of Fellows.....	7
8	Security Clearance and Nationality Requirements.....	8
9	Activities and Outputs.....	8
10	Subjects Covered.....	10
11	Value of Funding and Support Provided.....	10
12	Eligible Costs.....	11
13	Non-Eligible Costs.....	13
14	British Academy Additional Needs Funding.....	14
15	Head of Department Supporting Statement.....	14
16	Assessment.....	15
17	Duration and Start of Award.....	17
18	Timetable of 2026-27 Competition.....	17
19	Number of Awards and Strength of Competition.....	18
20	Responsibilities of Award-Holders.....	18

21	Reporting .....	18
22	Code of Practice .....	19
23	Feedback.....	19
24	Applications to Multiple British Academy Schemes .....	19
25	Outcome of Application .....	20
26	Contact Information .....	20

Last review date	March 2026
Next review date	March 2028

**Please read the scheme notes carefully. Incorrectly submitted applications will not be considered.**

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# 1 Aims and Purpose of the Scheme

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- 1.1 The British Academy has been funded by the UK Government, Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) to continue its support for the Innovation Fellowships scheme. The [Bridging Responsible AI Divides](#) (BRAID) programme, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), is also partnering with the Academy to co-fund the Digital Society cohort of this call.
- 1.2 This scheme provides funding and support for established early-career and mid-career researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences (the [SHAPE](#) disciplines) to partner with non-academic organisations to address challenges that require innovative approaches and solutions that are relevant to the UK. Through the Innovation Fellowships, our researchers in the SHAPE community are supported to create new and deeper links beyond academia, enabling knowledge mobilisation and translation, as well as individual skills development.
- 1.3 This call will enable researchers to work with a policy partner for 12 months. Successful applicants will work within specific policy areas set out by their chosen partner, which will correlate to areas of work in the British Academy's Resilient Communities or Digital Society policy programme. The outline of the Fellow's work programme will be finalised with the partner after the Fellowship is awarded.
- 1.4 These Fellowships are designed to ensure close interaction with policymakers, right at the heart of the partner's work. Government departments operate in a context where timely access to high-quality evidence-based analysis might be the difference between success and failure. Exerting influence, negotiating, and leveraging others' power at the right moment is crucial. This can make it difficult for researchers operating outside such organisations to influence policymaking – the Innovation Fellowship Route B: Policy-led Fellowships are designed to help change this.
- 1.5 The term 'policy-led' refers to the scope of the Fellowship being outlined by the partner. The themes of the Fellowship will be influenced by the partner organisation's priorities, with the award holder and the partner and award holder agreeing on a work programme of mutual interest. The partner organisations look to utilise the academic expertise, skills and experience of the successful applicant. Indicative questions for each partner organisation are outlined in the Scope Summaries.
- 1.6 The British Academy and the partners for this call aim to support up to 6 Fellowships in this round. The opportunities and areas of policy interest for this call are discussed below.

- 1.7 Prior to application submission, applicants must not contact the partner organisation regarding the application. Questions should be directed to [grants@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:grants@thebritishacademy.ac.uk).
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## 2 Features of the Scheme

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- 2.1 The policy partners under the 'Resilient Communities' strand are:
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
  - Ministry of Justice (MoJ)
  - Local Policy Innovation Partnerships (LPIP) Hub, City-REDI, University of Birmingham
  - Government Office for Science (GO Science)
- 2.2 The policy partners under the 'Digital Society' strand are:
- Digital Regulatory Cooperation Forum (DRCF)
  - Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- 2.3 **Henceforth the term 'partners' signifies information applicable to the partners for this call listed above. Information that refers to a specific partner is signified by the relevant acronym.**
- 2.4 Further information on each partner and scope can be found in the relevant Scopes Summaries.
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## 3 Applying to the Scheme

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- 3.1 Applicants should apply to work with **one** of the British Academy's partners, as above. They should set out how their experience and proposed work meets the requirements of the partner, and how it relates to and would help bring innovative ideas to the policy area they are applying for.
- 3.2 The researcher's employing institution must be a UK-based Higher Education Institution (HEI) or Independent Research Organisation (IRO). If successful, the relationship with the partner will be managed by the researcher. The relationship must be conducted in line with the Terms and Conditions of Award.
- 3.3 Applicants are asked to bear in mind that the Innovation Fellows will finalise a work programme with the partner after being awarded the Fellowship. **Applicants are therefore not required to provide a specific research proposal as part of their application** and, instead, should focus on demonstrating how their skills and experience would make them a good fit with the topics and research area specified in the relevant scope .

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## 4 Eligibility

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- 4.1 Applicants must be ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom with a current long-term appointment that will continue for at least as long as the period of the award at a UK-based institution (e.g. a Higher Education Institution or Independent Research Organisation). If your organisation is not currently registered on the Academy's grant management system, Flexi-Grant, please contact us via [grants@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:grants@thebritishacademy.ac.uk) to discuss possible registration.
- 4.2 Independent researchers who do not hold a post at a Higher Education Institution or Independent Research organisation **are not eligible to apply** for this scheme.
- 4.3 Applicants must also meet any security clearance and nationality requirements for their chosen partner. The level of security clearance and any nationality requirements are listed under the scopes of the individual fellowships.
- 4.4 Applications are welcome from early-career researchers and mid-career researchers. Typically, these terms can be defined as within 15 years of being awarded your PhD. This is, however, a guide and will be interpreted flexibly to accommodate any career breaks, caring leave, or non-traditional career trajectories. Applicants must self-define their career stage and provide any relevant details to support this. Applicants should be aware that if they are more advanced in their career, the assessors may determine that they are not within the bounds of the scheme. Applicants who do not have a doctorate may have equivalent experience, which they should define in the personal statement section.
- N.B.** Postgraduate students are **not eligible** to apply for grant support from the Academy, and applicants are asked to confirm in the personal details section that they are not currently working towards a PhD, nor awaiting the outcome of a viva voce examination, nor awaiting the acceptance of any corrections required by the examiners.
- 4.5 Applicants are eligible to apply if they have previously held an Innovation Fellowship: **Route A**, however, are **not** eligible to apply if they have previously held an Innovation Fellowship: **Route B**.

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## **5 Employing Institution Eligibility**

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- 5.1 Applicants must be based in an institution which must be listed as an approving-organisation in the British Academy's grant management system, Flexi-Grant. This institution (e.g. a Higher Education Institution or Independent Research Organisation) must be based in the United Kingdom and will be issued the Terms and Conditions of Award, if successful.
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## **6 Person Specification**

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- 6.1 Applicants must be an early or mid-career researcher based at a UK institution (e.g. a Higher Education Institution or Independent Research Organisation) with expertise in a Humanities and/or Social Science discipline. A range of methodological approaches or perspectives may be appropriate – the requirements of each partner are included within the scope specific guidance documents.
- 6.2 While the British Academy and its partners do not have preconceived ideas about the disciplinary background of Fellows, applicants will need to demonstrate a solid understanding of the relevant policy areas. Fellows will need to assess qualitative and quantitative evidence to produce evidence-based conclusions and/or policy advice/steers. Strong research and/or evaluation skills from a relevant disciplinary background are required, and applicants would benefit from a background in relevant policy areas, although demonstration of relevant transferable skills and a desire to develop knowledge of a new policy area is also encouraged.
- 6.3 Applicants should be open-minded, and willing to explore new perspectives and innovative approaches. They will have an appetite for working across academia and policy. They will be challenge-driven and receptive to integrating the perspectives, needs and priorities of the partner. They will be prepared to develop their programme of work with the partner, allowing them to work in a collaborative manner, as opposed to undertaking an isolated programme of work.

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## 7 General Requirements and Expectations of Fellows

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- 7.1 Fellows will conduct research and analysis in one or more areas of work to address a specified set of policy-driven research question(s), which are agreed at the outset of the Fellowship. Fellows will be working with teams within their chosen partner but will also be conducting independent research and analysis. As set out above, the nature of the work to be undertaken during the Fellowship will vary according to which department and policy area a Fellowship focuses on, with some Fellows working relatively independently, and others more firmly embedded within a team within their partner.
- 7.2 Work-planning will centre on the programme of work and analysis agreed at the outset. However, those Fellows who are more embedded and integrated within teams will be expected to reserve some time for responsive and demand-led analysis. An indicative list of these tasks might include:
- Providing evaluation, analysis, or policy research design advice to departments
  - Writing papers and shorter evidence and policy briefing notes
  - Oral briefings for senior officials and ministers
  - Meeting external and cross-government partners
  - Organising and running workshops on evidence and/or evaluation methodologies.
- 7.3 The ability to communicate clearly and succinctly, highlighting policy relevance to non-experts is important to all work. So too is the ability to work collaboratively with others and to do so at pace, sometimes delivering to tight deadlines.
- 7.4 The Fellows will need to agree to respect their department's values and standards of behaviour, including following the Civil service code, where applicable, and sign an agreement to that effect. Failure to do so may result in the termination of the Fellowship.

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## 8 Security Clearance and Nationality Requirements

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- 8.1 The Fellows for all partners, with the exception of LPIP, will need to receive security clearance before the final arrangements for a Fellowship can be confirmed. Security clearance will need to be processed once an offer has been made to the successful candidate – the formal confirmation of the offer will be contingent on the person obtaining this level of clearance. Loss of clearance during the Fellowship period, for example, due to personal conduct, will risk termination of the Fellowship. All security clearance decisions are personal to the applicant and depend on a range of factors. For further information on security clearance, please view the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.
- 8.2 The level of security clearance and any nationality requirements are listed under the scopes of the individual fellowships.
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## 9 Activities and Outputs

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- 9.1 Award-holders will be expected to play a role in promoting the approaches and methods that are the focus of their award in their own academic environments and the partner they are working in. Expected activities and outputs will be specific to the policy areas and partner teams the Fellow will be working with. They may involve, but are not limited to:
- Evidence notes/policy briefings – reports, notes and responses to key challenges/approaches for developing connections with policy leaders or innovators
  - Data analysis – identifying and analysing datasets that may be relevant to enhancing understanding and framing new solutions
  - Case studies – exploring practical or policy-orientated solutions, engagement between academic and non-academic environments and the wider benefits to individuals/communities/regions
  - Briefings/blogs/presentations/podcasts/videos and other outputs to reach a variety of policy audiences and environments
  - Conferences/workshops/webinars/training/toolkits/- outputs which enable and embed knowledge exchange with a wider academic and policy audience
  - Academic papers are encouraged but will need to be cleared with the partner prior to writing up and publication.
- 9.2 All activities and outputs are subject to agreement from the partner, in line with their departmental policy.

**It is important for applicants to note that, due to the individual policies of each partner and the nature of the Fellowship, guarantees cannot be given regarding any academic material that a Fellow may be permitted to publish.**

**As the Fellows will finalise the outline of a work programme with the partner after being awarded the Fellowship, outputs of the award also need to be agreed with the partner. Applicants are strongly encouraged to remain open minded regarding the form of any outputs from the Fellowship.**

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## 10 Subjects Covered

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- 10.1 Suitable subjects for the Fellowship include any field of study within the Humanities or Social Sciences. While all proposals should be situated in an appropriate field of study, they may vary considerably in their approach to conceptualisation, methodology and/or outputs, depending on the discipline. In some cases, creative and professional practice may play a significant role in shaping the methods and/or outcomes of research. In all proposals, whether practice-led or not, a clear scholarly rationale is required for the choice of research methods, processes and outputs.
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## 11 Value of Funding and Support Provided

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- 11.1 Innovation Fellowships are offered on a Full Economic Costing (FEC) basis. Applicants must enter the costs in the application form, Financial Details section, at 100% FEC. The maximum that can be claimed is £150,000 at 100%, of which the Academy will pay 80% (i.e. up to £120,000 if the full sum is requested).
- 11.2 There are four elements to the Full Economic Costing. The Directly Incurred Salary Costs are the costs of the time of the applicant. Directly Incurred Research Expenses include costs of travel and subsistence, as well as project costs. The other elements are Directly Allocated (Estates) Costs and Indirect Costs which cover costing for space, central support services and other necessary costs incurred by the employing institution in supporting the Fellow.
- N.B.** This is a Fellowship and not a project grant, therefore it is anticipated that most of the funding sought will be to support the costs associated with the applicant's time (through direct salary contribution).
- 11.3 As applicants are not asked to submit a research proposal, the British Academy acknowledges that applicants cannot provide a full breakdown of their Directly Incurred Research Expenses. Applicants must enter £12,500 at 100% FEC as the sum allocated to Research Expenses and may use this for travel and subsistence and other non-salary Directly Incurred costs. They should include a brief explanation of the anticipated broad types of activities that the fund will be used for. Successful applicants will be able to request approval from the Academy to amend budget items within this heading in line with the work programme that is agreed with their partner. Applicants **must** however specify their Directly Incurred Salary Costs and Indirect Costs.

- 11.4 The Academy recognises that the upper limit on the contribution that the Academy's funding can make to this award – £120,000 – might not be sufficient to cover all of the costs up to 80% of the Full Economic Cost value required. In those cases, an employing institution may need to be willing to make additional contributions to the overhead costs involved.
- 11.5 The applicant must commit between 0.4 and 0.8 FTE time to the Fellowship, providing justification for the time percentage as part of the application, especially if the time commitment is below 0.5 FTE. All of the grants awarded are expected to be used for the purposes specified in the application and agreed in the award-letter.

It is important to note that Fellowship funds can only be used for existing contracted time and academics are not able to use fellowship funds to extend their contracts. The FTE time requested for the Fellowship in the application must not exceed their contracted FTE.

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## 12 Eligible Costs

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### **Directly Incurred Salary Costs**

This is a Fellowship award paying for the time of the person appointed as the Innovation Fellow. Therefore, the cost for the time of the applicant should be submitted as Directly Incurred Salary Costs. The award can be used to support the employing institution's salary costs of the applicant for the duration of the award at between 0.4 and 0.8 FTE. It is expected that the majority of funding requested will cover the applicant's salary costs.

**It is important to note that Fellowship funds can only be used for existing contracted time and academics are not able to use fellowship funds to extend their contracts. The FTE time requested for the Fellowship in the application must not exceed their contracted FTE.**

### **Directly Incurred Research Expenses**

**Applicants must enter £12,500 at 100% FEC as the sum allocated to Research Expenses and may use this for travel and subsistence and other non-salary Directly Incurred costs. They should include a brief explanation of the anticipated broad types of activities that the fund will be used for.**

Eligible costs include the following:

Travel and subsistence within reasonable limits

Directly incurred project costs (e.g. workshops, website development, podcasts, transcription costs, specialist software)

**N.B.** Reasonable limits are judged as including activities that would represent a direct benefit to the proposed collaboration between the applicant and their chosen partner.

Applicants may wish to refer to the list of proposed activities and outputs for further guidance on relevant project costs.

Partners are keen to support flexible working arrangements and will work with successful applicants to determine a mutually agreeable working arrangement. Applicants should therefore provide a reasonable estimate of their anticipated travel costs to their chosen Fellowship partner.

#### **Directly Allocated Costs (incl. Estate costs)**

Standard Directly Allocated Costs (including Estates Costs) may be attributed to this award. However, it cannot include any directly allocated salary costs.

#### **Indirect Costs**

The award can include the employing institution's indirect costs incurred as a result of direct staff costs. The Indirect Costs heading will be calculated by the institution according to TRAC and needs to be declared only by means of a single figure, with no need for information about its derivation or justification. These include nonspecific costs charged across all projects based on estimates not otherwise included as Directly Allocated Costs. They include costs of the institution's administration such as personnel, finance, library and some departmental services.

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## 13 Non-Eligible Costs

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13.1 The following items are not eligible for funding:

- Research assistance
- Purchasing of assets
- Equipment costs
- Computer hardware including laptops, electronic notebooks, digital cameras, etc
- Books and other permanent resources
- The preparation of camera-ready copy, copy-editing, proof-reading, indexing, nor any other editorial task
- Subventions for direct production costs (printing, binding, distribution, marketing etc)
- Costs of publication in electronic media
- Carbon offsetting
- Open access fees

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## 14 British Academy Additional Needs Funding

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- 14.1 The British Academy has set aside specific funding to support any additional needs that applicants and award holders may have. This funding is available both to applicants, to assist in making an application to British Academy schemes, and award holders.
- 14.2 Further information about Additional Needs Funding can be found on the [British Academy website](#).
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## 15 Head of Department Supporting Statement

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- 15.1 The applicant is required to obtain a statement of support from their Head of Department as part of this application.
- The Head of Department should be the person who heads the Department, Faculty, Institute or other unit of an Independent Research Organisation in which you are currently working.
  - As Head of Department, they will be expected to comment on:
    - Their level of support for the application and the career development benefit to be gained by the applicant if the award is made.
    - They will be expected to confirm that the applicant will be released from duties at the employing institution for the duration of the award and be able to return to the employing institution once the award ends.
    - They must also note whether the applicant holds a permanent or fixed term contract, and in the case of the latter, when this contract is due to conclude. If the applicant is contracted for less than 1 FTE, their level of FTE must be specified.
    - NB. If the above points are not reflected in the statement, the Academy will not consider the statement to be sufficient.

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## 16 Assessment

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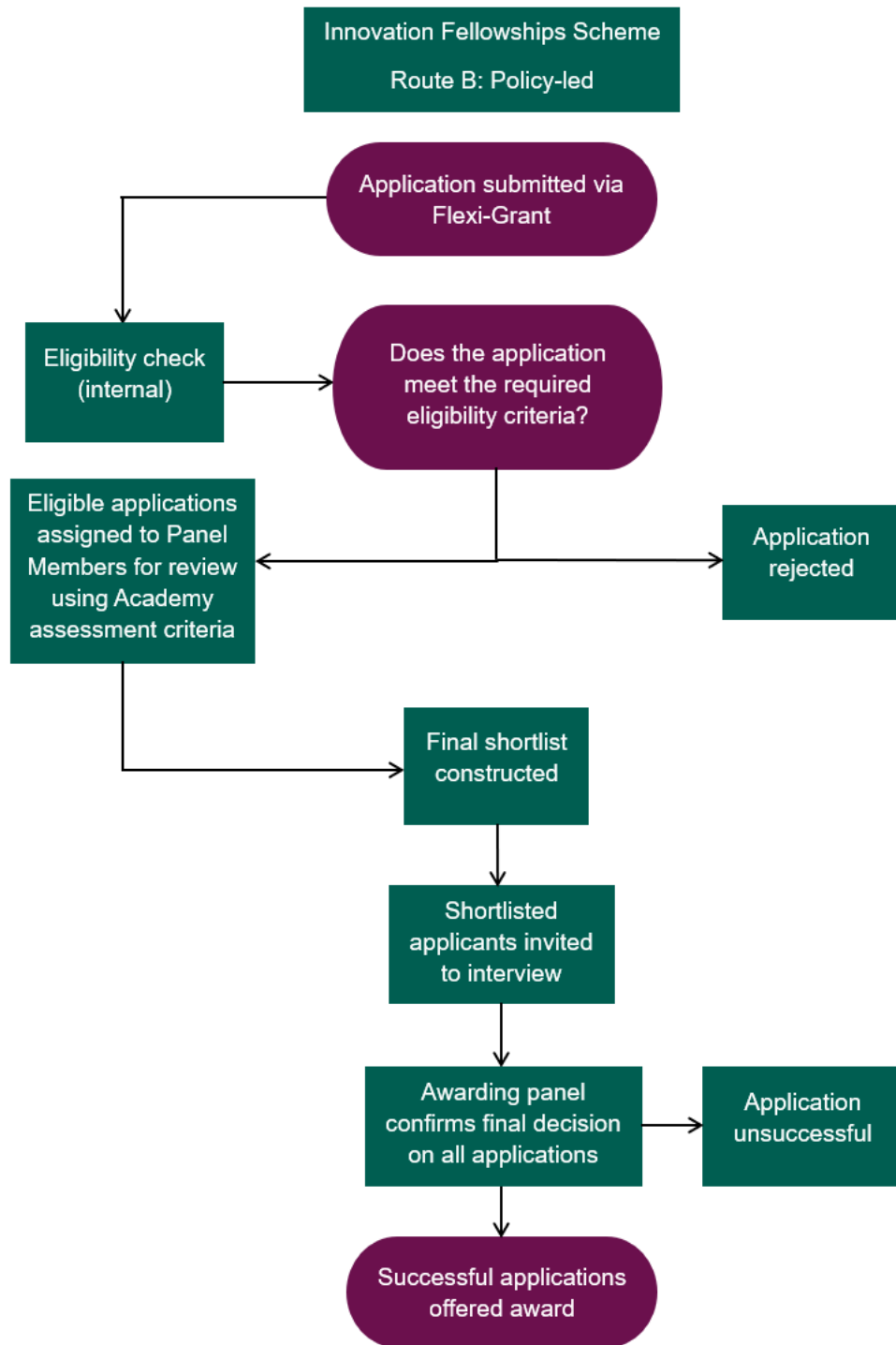
16.1 Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- The relevance of the applicant to the Scope of the Fellowship as defined above
- The experience and suitability of the applicant in engaging closely with policy counterparts and future colleagues in government departments, including but not limited to the partner, and/or experience in working with policymakers on similar topics or areas of interest previously
- The anticipated benefit and impact on the partner's areas of interest as expressed in the Scope Summaries and the applicant's future policy engagement ambitions
- The anticipated benefit of the proposed partnership with regards to knowledge exchange between academic and non-academic environments
- The anticipated contributions to the British Academy's wider policy work
- The ability of the applicant to provide policy relevant, clear and succinct oral briefings (will be assessed at interview if applicants are invited to interview)
- Comparative judgements about value for money may be considered at the final stage of assessment
- The career benefit to the applicant may also be considered at the final stage of assessment

**As Fellows would finalise the outline of a work programme with the partner after being awarded the Fellowship, applicants are not required to submit a research proposal. Reviewers will assess applications in relation to above criteria and will not reward applicants for including a research proposal.**

16.2 All eligible proposals submitted in response to this call will be peer-reviewed by reviewers with subject/sector-specific expertise, including representatives of the partner organisation. The peer review assessments will be considered by a Final Awarding Panel, which will conduct interviews with a shortlist of applicants. The Final Awarding Panel will meet after the call for applications is closed. When the Panel meets it will include an interview element as part of its assessment. Applicants who are shortlisted at this stage are required to be available to attend these interviews at the beginning of October as a mandatory part of the assessment process.

16.3 All applicants will be notified of the outcome of the application by late October 2026 for start date in March 2027. The approving organisation will be asked to give its consent before the award is confirmed.



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## 17 Duration and Start of Award

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- 17.1 Awards can be held for 12 months. Awards are expected to commence between 1-31 March 2027.
- 17.2 This start date is to allow time for security clearance and onboarding to be completed by successful applicants after an offer has been made. In the instance that arrangements should be finalised in advance of March 2027, with the agreement of the Fellow and the Fellow's institution, it would be possible for their start date to be brought forward.
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## 18 Timetable of 2026-27 Competition

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**Competition Opens:** 10 June 2026  
**Application Deadline:** 5 August 2026, 17:00 (UK time)  
**Interviews:** Approx. mid October 2026  
**Notification of Result:** Approx. late October 2026  
**Starting period of Award(s):** Between 1-31 March 2027  
**Duration of Award(s):** A duration of 12 months

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## 19 Number of Awards and Strength of Competition

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- 19.1 It is expected that up to 6 awards will be made for this round of the Route B: Policy-led Innovation Fellowships.
- 19.2 This is one of our newest schemes and, due to this, the strength of competition is difficult to estimate. However, the success rate is unlikely to exceed 20%.
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## 20 Responsibilities of Award-Holders

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- 20.1 Award-holders will be expected to act as champions for academic-policy engagement within their institutions and partner organisations, and to liaise with and feed insights into relevant British Academy policy programmes, as well as through broader British Academy networks. This is expected to involve:
- working within and across the partner organisation as required by the agreed programme of work and the role
  - discussing their analyses and insights with the British Academy policy team, engaging in regular catch-ups and discussions about their work
  - sitting upon a relevant British Academy policy advisory group
  - engaging with individuals both within and beyond academia as relevant to the programme of work
  - proactively identifying opportunities to promote and advance the role of the [SHAPE](#) subjects
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## 21 Reporting

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- 21.1 In addition to the responsibilities above, award-holders are required to complete two reports:
- A final report from award holders within three months of the award's end, detailing the progress of the activities in which they participated.
  - A post-award report three years after the award's end showing the impact of the award on their subsequent career.

- The statement submitted by the Head of Department should be on letterheaded paper, dated and signed by the Head of Department.
- Please note that the Head of Department statement must be received before you can formally submit the application for approval, and you are strongly advised to ensure that your Head of Department submits the statement well in advance of the formal applicant deadline for this round of competition as noted above.
- If the applicant is also Head of Department, the statement must be provided by another suitable individual, e.g. Deputy Head or Head of School.

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## 22 Code of Practice

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- 22.1 The Academy has a [Code of Practice](#) for assessing research applications, setting out the principles of equity, integrity and confidentiality governing the treatment of all applications for research support. The Code of Practice also covers Data Protection, the Academy's ethics policy and the appeals procedure.

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## 23 Feedback

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- 23.1 Feedback is not a feature of the Innovation Fellowships scheme and the Academy is, regrettably, unable to enter correspondence regarding the decisions of the Final Awarding Panel, which are governed by the Code of Practice. Please note that by applying to this scheme, applicants undertake to accept the terms under which applications are assessed.

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## 24 Applications to Multiple British Academy Schemes

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- 24.1 There must be no duplication of funding for the same purpose. Applicants may not hold more than one British Academy award of a comparable nature at any one time. For example, it would not be possible to hold two British Academy Fellowship awards at the same time; but it may be possible to hold a British Academy grant (i.e. Talent Development Award or BA/Leverhulme Small Research Grant) and a British Academy Fellowship at the same time, depending on the amount of time required for the Fellowship.
- 24.2 Please note the following:
- It is acceptable to apply for this scheme and the following schemes, and hold both awards, if successful, provided there is no duplication

of cost: BA/Leverhulme Small Research Grants, Talent Development Awards.

- You can apply to both the Innovation Fellowships and the following schemes. However, you cannot be successful in both: Postdoctoral Fellowships, Mid-Career Fellowships,

24.3 **Please note that an application cannot be accepted if there is a report outstanding on any previous research grant awarded by the Academy to the applicant named in the current proposal. Failure to follow this guidance will result in your application being withdrawn from this round of competition. Duplicate applications for the same purpose to more than one Academy scheme will not be accepted.**

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## 25 Outcome of Application

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25.1 Once your application has been submitted – complete with a statement of support from your Head of Department – and it has been approved by your employing institution, you will not be contacted again by the British Academy until the decisions have been made. You can track the progress of your application by logging in again to the Flexi-Grant system at any time. Results are issued by email.

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## 26 Contact Information

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- 26.1 Applicants in any doubt about their eligibility or any other aspect of their application are advised to contact the Research Funding Office at the Academy, where staff will be pleased to assist:  
[grants@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:grants@thebritishacademy.ac.uk)
- 26.2 Due to remote working, we recommend contacting us by email only.

### Important Dates

**Deadline for application submission and organisation approval: 5 August 2026, 17:00 (UK time)**

**Results to be announced by email to address on application: approx. late October 2026**