

# Innovation Fellowships Scheme 2026-27, Route B Policy-led Scope Summary - Digital Society

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Last review date	March2026
Next review date	March 2027

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

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## 1 Introduction to Digital Society

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- 1.1 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 own [Digital Society](#) policy programme. All collaborators have outlined scopes falling within this theme, which are detailed below.
- 1.2 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), will be partnering with the Academy to co-fund this Digital Society cohort of Innovation Fellowships.
- 1.3 The BRAID programme is dedicated to integrating the whole range of arts and humanities research more fully into the responsible AI ecosystem, as well as bridging the divides between academic, industry, policy and regulatory work on responsible AI. BRAID also runs its own separate Fellowship scheme, which aims to build new partnerships between academia, industry, policymakers, and wider publics as well as to identify and lower barriers to the adoption of responsible AI frameworks and practices. The programme team work to connect funded projects and enable access to our network and activities, including regular cohort meetings and opportunities to present work and publish public-facing material.
- 1.4 This Fellowship scheme will be administered in a complementary fashion [to BRAID's fellowship scheme](#), and we will wish to ensure that activities and support mechanisms are in place to ensure that Fellows across both schemes are connected and able to build on each other's work and form a productive cohort together. As this call is supported by both British Academy and BRAID, Digital Society Innovation Fellows will also have access to the range of benefits provided in BRAID's Fellowship programme.

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## 2 Features of the Scheme

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- 2.1 Route B Innovation Fellows work with policy partners specified by the British Academy. Under the heading of 'Digital Society' the partners for this round of the scheme are:
- Digital Regulatory Cooperation Forum (DRCF)
  - Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

- 2.2 Applicants should note that the Fellow will finalise the outline of a work programme with the partner after being awarded the Fellowship, and therefore applicants are not required to submit a research proposal as part of the application.
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### 3 Fellowship with the Digital Regulatory Cooperation Forum (DRCF)

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- 3.1 The DRCF brings together four UK regulators with responsibilities for digital regulation – the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and Ofcom. The DRCF enables regulatory coherence and collaboration on digital and AI regulation, including with a view to enabling its member regulators to understand and adapt to the opportunities and risks of emerging technologies. The DRCF’s collaborative activities aim to benefit UK citizens and consumers online, while also encouraging innovation and growth on the part of UK businesses.
- 3.2 The DRCF is a voluntary cooperation forum that facilitates engagement between member regulators on digital policy areas of mutual interest. The DRCF is not a statutory entity and does not provide formal advice or direction to member regulators, who remain individually accountable for the delivery of their functions.
- 3.3 The holder of this Fellowship will work with the DRCF Core Team, which comprises colleagues from all four member regulators.
- 3.4 The Fellow will lead research for the DRCF regulators on aspects of **consumer protection, innovation and regulation in a data-driven, AI-enabled economy**.
- 3.5 Within their Fellowship proposal, applicants should explain how their research expertise and experience equip them to provide the DRCF with insights into our areas of interest outlined above. We encourage applicants to propose particular research topics they would pursue if selected as BA Fellow, including the rationale and envisaged impact and a sketch of potentially appropriate research methods. An indicative list of research topics the Fellow may pursue at the DRCF includes:
- AI adoption and regulation, for example exploring risks created by AI dependencies and mitigation strategies, how to ensure regulatory coherence and manage overlapping remits between DRCF member regulators, as well as testing some of the economic assumptions that go into price projections and productivity gains.

- Cross-sectoral analysis of cybersecurity risks and vulnerabilities created by frontier AI models and quantum computing, and how to make regulation of cybersecurity more effective in preparation for new responsibilities anticipated under the forthcoming Cyber Security and Resilience Bill.
- Consumer understanding of their data rights and of how data is used in the digital economy, in particular in the context of cross-sectoral Smart Data schemes envisaged under the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 (for example if and when Open Finance incorporates additional sources of data) to help regulators better understand dimensions of consumer value and vulnerability, and to advise on the design of consent journeys or consumer transparency materials in the future.

3.6 DRCF will work with the Fellow in scoping their research to ensure that their work leads to findings and insights that are of practical value to policy discussions.

3.7 Fellows applying to this topic will be working with and alongside the DRCF Core Team. The DRCF is based at Ofcom's headquarters in London (Ofcom office address is Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London, SE1 9HA). The DRCF Core Team operates a flexible working policy in line with Ofcom requirements. This means core team members usually attend the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays each working week. The fellow will be conducting independent research and analysis during the Fellowship with steers from the DRCF CEO and from the senior leaders among the DRCF member regulators (CMA, ICO, FCA and Ofcom).

Please note that for security reasons, successful applicants will have to be security cleared before the final arrangements for a Fellowship can be confirmed. Fellows will be required to receive security clearance at the [Baseline Personnel Security Standard](#). For DRCF Fellows, there are no nationality requirements.

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## 4 Fellowship with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

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- 4.1 Skills England aims to support the Government in understanding how best to enable the workforce to capitalise on advances in AI, while mitigating potential disadvantages for specific groups. A core element of this work is contributing to the delivery of the Government's ambition to upskill [10 million workers in AI](#).
- 4.2 The Fellow will work in collaboration with the Insight and AI team within Skills England, working closely with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and wider cross government partners, including DSIT's newly established Artificial Intelligence Economic Unit.
- 4.3 Fellows will conduct research and analysis in one or more areas of work to address policy-driven research question(s) agreed at the outset of the Fellowship. This Fellowship will be working with teams within the Insight and AI division but will also be conducting independent research and analysis.
- 4.4 The Fellow's research will help inform how activities around AI upskilling can be directed to maximise impact, inclusion and labour market outcomes, building on existing analysis of AI skills. The central topic the Fellow will be working on is: **targeting AI upskilling activities geographically and socially to prevent widening labour market inequalities and ensure good work outcomes as AI adoption accelerates**. The research will help to ensure that national AI skills investment is targeted, equitable and aligned with the realities of local labour markets and lived experience. The Fellow will generate practical, policy-ready insights to shape outreach, programme design and partnership working.
- 4.5 The two geographical and social strands of the work are concerned with the following:
- Geographical focus – aligning activities supporting the upskilling of 10 million workers with local needs, labour market conditions and existing delivery.
  - Social groups focus – ensuring the programme reaches and supports groups most exposed to AI-driven change and least able to adapt.
- 4.6 Within the geographic focus, core questions may include:
- Using LSIP reports, relevant Strategic Authority strategies and engagement with stakeholders, what sectors, learner groups and actions related to AI or digital skills are being prioritised? How explicit and mature are different areas' approaches, and how does this vary geographically?

- What role are mayoral combined authorities and other Strategic Authorities playing in convening employers, providers and funders around AI-related skills? Both to understand the skills are relevant to AI needed in that area, and ensuring that qualifications and training plans include these.
- How do local plans address the following in relation to the local conditions: rates of economic inactivity and NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training); baseline skills levels and occupational structure; exposure to AI and related task change by sector and level; presence of growth clusters such as digital, data and advanced services.
- Which places appear well served by local AI skills plans and provision, and where is coverage weakest relative to need?

4.7 While the social focus may consider:

- Which workers and learners are most exposed and least able to adapt to AI? What factors impact access (e.g. age, background, ethnicity, disability, profession, qualification level etc)?
- Building on existing modelling and sector skills council evidence, which groups face the greatest risk from AI-driven job and task change combined with low access to retraining?
- Are there new or improved indicators that could help track AI-related disruption and adaptation over time, particularly for lower-paid or lower-qualified groups?
- What design features, messaging and delivery models make AI training attractive, relevant and usable for groups who might otherwise disengage and what are the barriers to access? We have some evidence on barriers and what works but would be useful to test and develop these further.

4.8 Both the geographical and social strands will consider the same three cross cutting questions:

- **Good work and human-centred AI** – ensuring skills policy supports autonomy, progression and job quality.
- **Young people and labour market entry** – particularly in the context of potential flatter or more “diamond-shaped” organisational structures and reduced entry-level opportunities.
- **Employer behaviour and demand** – recognising that training uptake is shaped by job design, management capability and business strategy as well as individual motivation.

- 4.9 Applicants should note that the proposal is not fixed, and Skills England are open to the successful applicant helping to shape this work as long as it relates to the central topic: **targeting AI upskilling activities geographically and socially to prevent widening labour market inequalities and ensure good work outcomes as AI adoption accelerates.**
- 4.10 It would be advantageous but not essential for the Fellow to be able to apply both qualitative and quantitative evidence and to have data science/analytical expertise (with the use of Excel and a coding package such as R or Python). These skills would aid with the production of evidence-based conclusions and/or policy advice/steers.
- 4.11 The Fellow would be expected to follow the usual working arrangements that are set out by their academic employing institution. They will be required to attend some Skills England meetings in person, while the majority of meeting through the fellowship will take place online.

Please note that for security reasons, successful applicants will have to be security cleared before the final arrangements for a Fellowship can be confirmed. Fellows will be required to receive security clearance at the [Baseline Personnel Security Standard](#). For DWP Fellows, there are no nationality requirements.