

British Academy and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Innovation Fellowships

Route B Innovation Fellowships Scheme 2026-27

Scheme Notes for Applicants – Route B: Policy-led
2026-27 Competition

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Please read the scheme notes carefully. Any application incorrectly submitted will not be eligible for award.

Applications should be submitted well in advance of the deadline; we recommend at least five days prior to allow for institutional approval.

1 Aims of the scheme

- 1.1 The British Academy has been funded by the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade to support the Innovation Fellowships. The Academy is also working on this scheme in partnership with other partners, including the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and Cabinet Office, as per this call.
 - 1.2 The Innovation Fellowships scheme provides funding and support for established early-career and mid-career researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences to partner with organisations and business in the creative and cultural, public, private and policy sectors, to address challenges that require innovative approaches and solutions. Through the Innovation Fellowships, researchers in the SHAPE community will be supported to create new and deeper links beyond academia, so enabling knowledge mobilisation and translation, as well as individual skills development.
 - 1.3 The Academy is offering up to two 1-year fellowships hosted in the partner's offices. The Academy is able to offer awards of up to £120,000 for 12 months in duration (with Full Economic Costing at 80%).
 - 1.4 **Applications must be submitted by 18 November 2026 17.00 (UK time)**
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2 Features of the scheme

- 2.1 The Innovation Fellowships scheme has two routes: Route A: Researcher-led and Route B: Policy-led. This call is for Route B with the Academy working with the FCDO in relation to the fellowships outlined in 4.2-4.5, and the Cabinet Office in relation to 4.6.
- 2.2 The current scheme guidance notes give details for Route B (Policy-led), and specifically in relation to our partnership with the FCDO and Cabinet Office. Please note that only one application for this call may be submitted.
- 2.3 All Innovation Fellows under the different routes, regardless of stream or partner, will have the opportunity to participate in cross-learning and other cohort-based activities.

3 Person specification

- 3.1 The British Academy is inviting applications from early-career and mid-career researchers who are working on the themes outlined below who could contribute fresh perspectives to a specified challenge. Applicants might have expertise from a wide range of disciplinary, conceptual and methodological perspectives, including analytical, policy and practical perspectives. You must be an early-career or mid-career researcher based at an institution in the UK (e.g., a Higher Education Institution [HEI] or Independent Research Organisation [IRO]), from disciplines within the Humanities and Social Sciences.
- 3.2 The Innovation Fellowship scheme will enable you to develop outcomes that transform our understanding of and response to societal challenges, and offer solutions to shape policy and practice. You will be able to draw on the expertise, insights and challenge of policymakers and practitioners, and benefit from their continued engagement through their award. This is an opportunity for all participants to form new collaborations and draw on the insights this brings to inform, influence and develop their future development.
- 3.3 We seek open-mindedness, a willingness to explore new perspectives and to experiment with innovative approaches. You will have an appetite for working across academia, policy and practice, and will demonstrate a commitment to being genuinely challenge driven and dedicated to integrating the perspectives, needs and priorities of the partner. All applicants should strongly consider the potential for engagement between academic and non-academic environments as part of their applications.
- 3.4 The British Academy and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and Cabinet Office are aiming to support up to two Innovation Fellowships in this call.
- 3.5 The FCDO and Cabinet Office have specialised research requirements, operating in a context where timely access to high-quality evidence-based analysis can mean the difference between success and failure. Exerting influence, negotiating and leveraging others' power at precisely the right moment is at a premium. This can make it difficult for researchers operating outside the FCDO to have a significant impact. These Fellowships will provide an opportunity to change that by enabling close interaction with FCDO policymakers directly in the heart of this government department's work.

4 Scope of the Fellowship

- 4.1 The Academy and the FCDO invite applications for Fellowships in any of the following areas.
- 4.2 **Applied History:** This Fellowship offers the opportunity to work with the Historians Team in the Global Strategy Department of the FCDO. The Innovation Fellowship award holder will collaborate with colleagues in the Strategy Directorate and others across the FCDO and foreign policy community in Whitehall, to develop understanding amongst policymakers on how the history of the 1930s might help them think better about present-day challenges. In particular, they will look to develop historical awareness amongst policy-making colleagues of how the UK state conducted diplomacy, made policy and formulated strategy in the face of multiple challenges and crises, including rapid technological change, stubborn economic malaise, overwhelming global commitments, increasing international isolation, and the growing number and strength of adversaries. The Innovation Fellowship award holder will also support the Historians' wider Applied History work - providing rapid, policy-focused historical analysis - and use their own networks to help strengthen the Historians team's links with external researchers.
- 4.3 **Critical Infrastructure and European Warfare:** This Innovation Fellowship offers the opportunity to work with the FCDO's Eastern Research Group on the long-term implications of wartime damage to critical infrastructure in contemporary European warfare. The Innovation Fellowship award holder, likely from a background in energy economics, infrastructure policy, political economy or economic geography, will help us to understand the technical vulnerabilities and resilience of infrastructure, and the political and economic realities which flow from that, both in wartime and in a post-war context. Working with policymakers across the FCDO and Whitehall, the Innovation Fellowship award holder will also contribute to workstreams on post-war recovery, including how wartime damage influences reconstruction priorities, investment decisions and prospects for economic recovery, as well as opportunities to improve resilience, energy security, efficiency and technological modernisation in future infrastructure design.

- 4.4 **South Asia Geopolitics and Regional Security:** The South Asia and Afghanistan Research Group (SAARG) is seeking a British Academy Innovation Fellow to inform and advise policymakers across the FCDO on South Asia and its wider neighbourhood. The region is of growing importance to the UK through expanding strategic partnerships, economic ties and people-to-people links. The Innovation Fellowship award holder will examine how deepening links between South Asia and the Middle East are reshaping South Asia's geopolitical landscape, security dynamics and political alignments, and what this means for regional stability, UK interests and foreign policy. The Innovation Fellowship award holder will provide policy-focused research and advice on issues of strategic importance to the UK, informing policymaking across the FCDO and wider Whitehall while strengthening links between government and academia.
- 4.5 **The UK-France Relationship in 2027 and Beyond:** The FCDO Europe Research Group is seeking a British Academy Innovation Fellow to inform and deepen policymakers understanding of the political, institutional and strategic factors shaping France's domestic and foreign policy, including the UK-France bilateral relationship and France's role within the EU. The Innovation Fellowship award holder will examine political developments in France and implications for European policymaking, economic policy, security and wider international priorities. Expertise on French domestic politics, France's foreign policy and France and the EU is particularly welcome. The Innovation Fellowship award holder will also help strengthen links with academic and policy experts, ensuring that high-quality external research informs FCDO policymaking and strategic thinking on France and Europe. They will support the Europe Research Group's day-to-day work by providing timely, policy-focused analysis, producing briefings, responding to rapid commissions and contributing to longer-term research projects on European and EU issues.
- 4.6 **UK National Security Strategy:** This Fellowship offers the opportunity to work within the Strategy Unit of the National Security Secretariat in the Office for the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Innovation Fellowship award holder will collaborate with colleagues in the Strategy Unit to develop thinking and ideas to drive the delivery of the UK's National Security Strategy. They will work to identify areas where the UK can develop new strategic strengths, for example in cutting edge technology or new international partnerships. The holder will have expertise in national security and at least one of the following areas: international affairs, economics and emerging technology. They will work with the team to develop actionable policy recommendations and also support wider engagement by using their own networks to bring in external expertise into the centre of government.

5 Working at and with the FCDO

- 5.1 These Fellowships will be fully integrated into the FCDO's structure and are placed within a research and/or policy and strategy focussed team in the FCDO: Fellows have a line manager and additional support and mentoring will be provided.¹
- 5.2 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, as well as organising and running masterclasses. The Fellows would agree the outline of a work programme with their FCDO line manager and team.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 The Fellows will need to agree to respect the FCDO's values and standards of behaviour and sign an agreement to that effect. Failure to do so may result in the termination of the Fellowship.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 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 terms and conditions of award will include the above.
- 5.7 For security reasons, and in line with FCDO policy, successful applicants have to be security cleared before the offer of a Fellowship can be confirmed. The level of security clearance required for Fellowships 4.2 - 4.4 is 'Security Check'. The level of clearance required for the Fellowship

¹ As noted above, in the context of this call, reference to the FCDO relates to the Fellowships offered from 4.2 to 4.6, including the Fellowship offered in 4.6, which would be hosted by the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.

outlined in 4.6 is only open to UK nationals and is 'Developed Vetting', this would normally need 10 years' UK residency in the past 10 years. Applicants are expected to provide information requested by FCDO in a timely manner. More information can be found [here](#) and [here](#). The start date of the award will depend on successful completion of the security check and signature of the agreement at para 5.6, above. The length of time it takes to complete the process will vary from person to person. 'Security Check' may be complete within six weeks, 'Developed Vetting' could take several months.

- 5.8 While UK nationality for 4.2 - 4.5 is not essential, applicants need to have spent a minimum of two years living in the UK (having a UK bank account or UK address for is not enough).
- 5.9 Note that nationality is not in itself a barrier – this includes holding other nationalities alongside British nationality (i.e. dual nationals) - but potential applicants with close ties to the country or area on which they would be working, may find there are security limitations that would prevent them from accessing the necessary material thus rendering them unable to fulfil this fellowship.
- 5.10 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.

6 Value of funding and support provided

- 6.1 Awards 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).
- 6.2 There are three elements to the Full Economic Costing. The Directly Incurred Salary Costs are the costs of the time of the Lead Applicant as this is a Fellowship award. 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.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 All of the grants awarded are expected to be used solely for the purposes specified in the application and agreed in the award-letter.
- 6.5 The Applicant must commit between 0.6 and 0.8 FTE time to the Fellowship, providing justification for the time percentage as part of the application.

7 Timetable

- 7.1 The deadline for applications to be submitted to this call is **Wednesday 18 November 2026 at 17.00 (UK Time)**. This includes the employing institution approver approving the completed application by the submission deadline. Any applications submitted after that deadline will be ineligible.
- 7.2 The final awards panel will meet after the call for applications are closed. When the Panel meets it will include an interview element as part of its assessment. Applicants are required to be available to attend these interviews as a mandatory part of the assessment process.

8 Duration and start of Award

- 8.1 Awards are for a period of 12 months.
 - 8.2 Awards are expected to commence no later than 31 March 2027.
 - 8.3 The start date of the fellowship award will depend on the successful completion of the security check and signature of the agreement. Applicants are expected to provide information requested by FCDO in a timely manner to enable the fellowship to begin promptly.
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9 Reporting

- 9.1 Award holders are required to complete three reports:
 - a) An interim report at the midpoint of the Fellowship reporting on progress and lessons learnt to date.
 - b) A final report from award holders within three months of the award's end, detailing the progress of the activities in which they participated.
 - c) A post-award report three years after the award's end showing the impact of the award on their subsequent career.
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10 Applicant eligibility

- 10.1 Eligible 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 [HEI] or Independent Research Organisation [IRO]).
- 10.2 They must also meet the requirements set out above in the 'Working at and with the FCDO' section.
- 10.3 Applications are welcome from early-career researchers and mid-career researchers. Please note that applications from independent researchers cannot be accepted in this round of the scheme.
- 10.4 Applicants may not hold more than one British Academy award of a comparable nature at any one time.
- 10.5 Applicants for the Innovation Fellowships Scheme should be intending to pursue challenges that can benefit from the contribution of Humanities or Social Sciences expertise.
- 10.6 Postgraduate students are **not** eligible to apply for grant support from the Academy, and Applicants are asked to confirm in the personal details

section(s) 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.

11 Employing organisation eligibility

- 11.1 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 [HEI] or Independent Research Organisation [IRO]) must be based in the United Kingdom and will be issued the Terms and Conditions of the award, if successful.
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12 Eligible costs

- 12.1 Innovation Fellowship awards 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). This includes all direct and indirect costs incurred by the employing institution, including space, central support services, and other necessary costs incurred by the employing institution on behalf of the Fellow.
- 12.2 Funding will be provided on the Full Economic Costing (FEC) basis primarily to cover the salary of the Applicant. The Innovation Fellow will be expected to spend their allocated time of between 0.6 and 0.8 FTE working with the FCDO in their office and/or other mutually agreed sites.
- 12.3 Eligible costs will be funded under the following headings:
- a) **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 Lead Applicant should be submitted as Directly Incurred Salary Costs. The award can be used to support the employing institution's salary costs of the Lead Applicant for the duration of the award at between 0.6 and 0.8 FTE. It is expected that the majority of funding requested will cover the Lead Applicant's salary costs.
 - b) **Estates and indirect costs.** The award can include the employing institution's estate and indirect costs incurred as a result of direct staff costs.

13 Non-eligible Costs

- 13.1 The following items are **not eligible** for funding (applicants registered with special needs may consult the Academy about possible exceptions prior to application):
- a) directly allocated salary costs: No directly allocated costs can be attributed to this award;
 - b) purchasing of assets;
 - c) equipment costs;
 - d) computer hardware including laptops, electronic notebooks, digital cameras, etc;
 - e) books and other permanent resources;
 - f) the preparation of camera-ready copy, copy-editing, proof-reading, indexing, nor any other editorial task;
 - g) subventions for direct production costs (printing, binding, distribution, marketing etc);
 - h) costs of publication in electronic media;
 - i) carbon offsetting;
 - j) open access fees.

14 Head of Department Supporting Statement

- 14.1 Applicants are required to obtain a statement of support from their Head of Department as part of this application.
- 14.2 The Head of Department should be the person who heads the Department, Faculty, Institute or other unit of an Independent Research Organisation (IRO) in which you are currently working. As Head of Department, they will be expected to comment their level of support for the application and on the career development benefit to be gained by the Applicant if the award is made. They will be expected to also 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.

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.

- 14.3 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.
- 14.4 Heads of Department must be invited to contribute to your application via the Flexi-Grant system. Please see further guidance below:
- 14.5 They can be invited through the 'Contributors' tab displayed on the application form summary page. Once they have been invited, they will receive an email notification with instructions on how to contribute.
- 14.6 You can monitor the progress of your participants' activity through this section of the application form, and issue reminders as required. Once the recipient has accepted your invitation, their status will be displayed as 'active'. Upon completion of their section of the application form, their status will be displayed as 'complete'.
- 14.7 Once participants have completed all their sections of the application form, please remind them to select 'Save & Submit' on the application form page or select 'Submit your contribution' on the summary page.
- 14.8 You will not be able to submit your application form until the status of all participants shows as 'complete' in the 'Contributors' tab.

Please also note that an application cannot be submitted until all required contributors have submitted their contribution first. We recommend that supporting participants fulfil their requirements at least 5 working days before the submission deadline to ensure there is sufficient time for organisational approval.

The employing institution approver must approve the completed application by the submission deadline.

15 Selection Criteria

- 15.1 All eligible proposals submitted in response to this call will be assessed by relevant peer reviewers and then considered by a final selection panel, which will conduct **interviews** with a shortlist of applicants.
- 15.2 Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:
- a) The research expertise of the applicant in their chosen area of interest;
 - b) The experience and interest of the applicant in engaging closely with policy counterparts, and particularly with colleagues in the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (or Cabinet Office as appropriate);
 - c) The anticipated benefit and impact on the FCDO's policymaking process (or Cabinet Office as appropriate) and the applicant's future policy engagement ambitions;
 - d) The ability of the applicant to engage orally in their chosen research area of expertise, and particularly to be able to provide policy relevant, clear and succinct oral briefings (will be assessed at interview if applicants are invited to interview);
 - e) Value for money.
- 15.3 Applications will be assessed against the following criteria: All applicants will be notified of the outcome of the application by March 2027 for a start intended to be by no later than April 2027, subject to security clearance and the signing of a loan agreement with the FCDO or the Cabinet Office.
- 15.4 The approving organisation will be asked to give its consent before the award is confirmed.

16 Application and Assessment Procedure

- 16.1 All applicants must register in the British Academy's online [Flexi-Grant](#) system to enable the processing and assessment of their application. All applications must be submitted in English.
- 16.2 All applications will be subject to an eligibility check undertaken by appropriate British Academy staff before being put forward for assessment, and **applications that are not completed correctly and on time will not be considered.**
- 16.3 The deadline for submissions and UK institutional approval is **18 November 2026 at 17.00 (UK time). Applicants will not be allowed to make any changes to their applications or submit any additional information after the 1 October deadline.**

17 Code of Practice

- 17.1 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. The Code of Practice may be viewed on the Academy's website at <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/funding/code-practice>.
- 17.2 Feedback is not a feature of the Innovation Fellowships scheme and the Academy is, regrettably, unable to enter correspondence regarding the decisions of the awarding Committee, which are governed by the Code of Practice. Please note that by applying in this scheme, applicants undertake to accept the terms under which applications are assessed.

18 Contact Details and Further Information

- 18.1 Please contact the team via international@thebritishacademy.ac.uk for further information.