

British Ecological Society PhD Fellowship

Application Guidance

The British Ecological Society (BES) and Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) is offering a three-month fellowship to PhD students who are members of the BES. The fellowship will begin in January 2025 and this opportunity will be funded by BES.

1. Background

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST)

POST is the UK Parliament's in-house source of independent, balanced and accessible analysis of public policy issues related to science and technology.

Its aim is to inform parliamentary debate by:

- Publishing [POSTnotes](#) (short briefing notes)
- Supporting Select Committees with informal advice, oral briefings, background [POSTbrief](#) papers or follow-up research
- Informing both Houses on public dialogue activities in science and technology
- Organising events to stimulate debate on a wide range of topical issues
- Horizon-scanning to anticipate issues of science and technology that are likely to impact on policy.

POST (and the wider Research & Information team) is committed to increasing diversity and to maintaining an inclusive workplace culture. We welcome and encourage applications from underrepresented groups.

Further information about POST is available on [our website](#).

British Ecological Society

The BES support their members and combine their knowledge to promote ecological science and evidence informed solutions to policymakers. They offer training and development programmes for all career stages and work with members on briefings and consultation responses. Further information is available [here](#).

2. Details of placement

A PhD Fellowship is an exciting opportunity to gain real-world experience of the how research evidence is communicated to decision makers.

PhD Fellows join POST (or a Select Committee, the House of Commons Library or the House of Lords Library) for short-term secondments. Their role is to support the use of research evidence in Parliament. Most PhD Fellows are based at POST and during their time they produce a [POSTnote](#), which is a four-page summary on emerging science, technology or social science topic that is relevant and timely for Parliament. POSTnotes are widely used as

briefing material by Parliamentarians. PhD Fellows may also contribute to a longer report, assist a Select Committee in a current inquiry, and/or carry out related activities on an area of public policy. The exact role will be determined by the POST Board or relevant host parliamentary team.

POST is a strictly non-partisan organisation; PhD Fellows are expected to abstain from any party-political activity and generally to uphold the principles of parliamentary service, including a commitment to confidentiality and impartiality, during their time in Parliament. In all cases, PhD Fellows are encouraged to interact closely with people and activities in the two Houses of Parliament, including Select committees, MPs and Peers, their support services, 'All-Party Parliamentary Group' meetings and the very wide range of other activities at the Palace of Westminster. Access to conferences, workshops and seminars can be arranged.

The fellowship can be carried out full-time for three months or part-time over a longer period. Successful applicants will be expected to start their fellowship in January 2025. The exact start date is to be agreed between the applicant, BES, POST, and the applicant's supervisor.

3. Responsibilities

PhD Fellows may be asked to complete a range of different activities. These typically include:

- Identifying and liaising with a wide range of interested parties including industry, academia, regulatory bodies, non-governmental organisations and government
- Analysing research evidence from a range of sources, most likely outside of your specialism
- Drafting concise, understandable and impartial briefing materials for a non-specialist audience
- Responding to comments from internal and external peer reviewers

4. Security

Successful candidates will be required to complete pre-employment checks. This includes security vetting to Counter Terrorist Check (CTC) level. All successful candidates are required to pass these checks before an offer can be confirmed. You should be aware that if you have resided outside of the UK for a total of more than two of the last five years, you are not eligible to receive security clearance to work on the Parliamentary Estate. [Click here](#) for further information.

5. Hours

Fellows are expected to work a minimum of two days per week at Parliamentary offices in Westminster. If you are successful in your application, we will discuss the hours and location of the fellowship with you, but Select Committees will require office presence on the days the Committee meets.

Net conditions full-time working hours for staff of the House are 36 hours per week. This excludes daily meal breaks of one hour. POST offers flexible hours and the exact daily times of attendance will be agreed with line management.

6. Workplace Adjustments

As an inclusive employer, the House of Commons supports individuals in need of workplace adjustments. The workplace adjustment process prevents, reduces or removes problems you might face at work. Adjustments can be requested to help with obstacles relating to mental health, and physical or non-physical requirements. You can request a workplace adjustment if you have a disability or suffer from a difficulty or disadvantage in your workplace.

7. Our Values

The House Service is proud of our organisational values, which will deliver our strategy. These are the values that we demonstrate at work:

Inclusive: We value everyone equally; We respect each other; We all have a voice.

Courageous: We try new things; We own our actions and decisions; We learn from our mistakes.

Trusted: We trust each other to do a good job; We are impartial; We build confidence in Parliament with our integrity.

Collaborative: We share our knowledge and experience; We work towards a shared vision; We know we work better in a partnership.

8. Skills and Experience

Criterion 1: Researching

You are currently completing a PhD at a UK university or your PhD funding ended within the six months prior to the application deadline of 12 June 2024. You have excellent research and analytical skills and can gather and assess information from a range of sources. You also have the ability to work in new subject areas.

Criterion 2: Communicating

You can explain complex information clearly, impartially and succinctly to a non-specialist audience in writing. You are able to talk about research with a wide range of different people.

Criterion 3: Working with people

You are able to work successfully within a team, whilst upholding the values of equality, diversity and inclusion. As this role involves discussing research topics with various internal and external stakeholders, you are able to adapt personal and working styles to

accommodate the needs of others.

Criterion 4: Planning and organising

You are able to work independently. You can plan, manage and prioritise your workload to meet changing demands and tight deadlines.

Criterion 5: Interest in UK Parliament

We are looking to offer this fellowship opportunity to people who are interested in UK Parliament and want to learn more. You have an interest in how UK Parliament works, its role in scrutiny and legislation, and how research evidence is used in its work. You understand how Parliament and Government are different. You may also have an interest in UK Government and policy in general.

9. Eligibility

The BES PhD fellowship is open to current doctoral students studying at a UK University who are BES members.

Successful candidates will be required to complete pre-employment checks. This includes security vetting to Counter Terrorist Check (CTC) level. All successful candidates are required to pass these checks before an offer can be confirmed. You should be aware that if you have resided outside of the UK for a total of more than two of the last five years, you are not eligible to receive security clearance to work on the Parliamentary Estate. [Click here](#) for further information.

Some international students may have working restrictions as part of their visa that will require undertaking the Fellowship part-time. We will discuss this with all successful applicants on a case-by-case basis.

10. Funding arrangements

The successful applicant will receive a £7,200 award to cover their living costs while undertaking the three-month fellowship. Computing, email, and other facilities necessary for the project will be supplied by POST. £6,200 will be paid on at the start of the fellowship, and the remaining £1,000 on completion.

11. Advice on applying

The application process for the PhD Fellowship involves two stages: an initial application and an interview. Below you will find some advice for applicants about these two stages. We cannot offer further advice to individual candidates about applying to ensure fairness in the application process. The fellowship will be awarded competitively, and applications will be assessed by POST and the BES.

Initial application

The initial application involves submitting a short online form and writing a two-page briefing. Below are explanations of what you will be expected to submit, why we are asking for it, and how we will assess it. We also offer some advice on how to write your application.

Application form

In the application form we will ask questions to determine relevant skills and experience. For instance, these may include questions such as:

- A summary of your general PhD topic for a non-specialist audience. Your PhD progress and subject area are not being assessed (demonstrating criteria 1)
- Communicating research to a non-specialist audience (demonstrating criteria 2 communicating).
- About a time you have worked successfully as part of a team using planning and organising skills to achieve an objective (demonstrating criterion 3 working with people and 4 planning and organising).
- Why you are interested in undertaking a PhD Fellowship? This shows us how you demonstrate criterion 5 (interest in UK Parliament)

In responding to the questions that start 'please tell us', you may like to use [STAR format](#) (where you explain the situation, task, action and results of an example) as a tool to structure your answers. This allows us to understand the context and outcome of your example and can improve readability.

[Link to Application Form](#)

We also ask you to upload an approval form completed by your PhD Supervisor and Head of Department. We ask for this because we need to know that your supervisor and university would be willing to permit you to take some time away from your PhD to do a Fellowship with us.

[Link to Approval Form](#)

Two-page briefing

We ask you to write a two-page briefing on a topic that you think would be of current interest to Parliamentarians. The briefing should be completed using the briefing template and **should not contain your name or any other identifying details**. We want you to use the briefing template and ensure your work is not identifiable in order to make the process as fair and unbiased as possible.

We ask for you to provide this briefing to demonstrate criteria 1 and 2 (researching and communicating). As crafting this briefing is similar to the sort of work PhD Fellows carry out, it shows us that you can write in the sort of impartial, concise, accurate and readable way we aim for. We do not expect you to have written similar briefings before or have had experience writing for policymakers. We are looking for your potential, not perfection.

The criteria that we assess the briefing on are:

- *Content*: Briefings are designed to support the work of parliamentarians. Therefore, it is important to pick a topic that is likely to be timely and relevant to parliamentary discussion. Your briefing should draw on information from a wide range of relevant sources.
- *Writing style and clarity*: Briefings should be easily understood by a non-specialist audience, including people with no background in your chosen topic.

- *Structure:* Briefings are designed to have a clear structure and use headings and sub-headings to make them easy to navigate. They follow a logical order and do not introduce concepts without explaining them clearly.
- *Impartiality:* Briefings set out the relevant research and information about a topic in a balanced way, summarising the balance of opinion on issues, where applicable

We recommend that you look at our published [POSTnotes](#) to understand the type of topics they can cover and the writing style they use. In general, your two-page briefing should:

- Summarise relevant current research and developments in this field
- Highlight the main policy issues
- Demonstrate your ability to write in a style suitable for a parliamentary (rather than academic) audience

We suggest that you read over your briefing carefully after you have written it and consider whether there is any language you can simplify, if there are concepts that need more explanation, and whether you have introduced any of your own opinions or recommendations into the briefing (which you should remove to ensure impartiality). You may also want to run spellcheck and proofread your briefing to ensure it is as polished as it can be before you submit it.

[Link to Briefing Template](#)

Interview

Applicants that are successful at the initial application stage will be invited for interview. If you are invited to interview, we will ask you a combination of competency questions and role-specific questions based on the criteria set out in the job description.

In advance of the interview, we recommend you familiarise yourself with the role of UK Parliament and the function of certain offices within it (POST, the House of Commons Library, the House of Lords Library, the House of Commons Select Committees and the House of Lords Select Committees). We also suggest that you think about how you would approach writing a POSTnote or similar briefing if you were successful in your application.

As a Disability Confident Leader, it is important that we are able to make appropriate arrangements or adjustments where necessary in order to create a full and equal participation in the selection process. If you require any reasonable adjustments, please indicate this in your application and we will get in touch with you to ensure these needs are met.

12. Application timetable

Activity	Date
Advert released	01.05.2024
Deadline for applications	12.06.2024
Initial sift of applications	19.06.2024
Interviews	11.07.2024

Final decision	15.07.2024
Start date for successful applicant	January 2025

13. Contacts & further information

If you would like more information about POST or our fellowships, please see our [frequently asked questions](#) page on our website.

If you have a question that is not answered in this guidance, the job description or our frequently asked questions page, please contact:

Jonathan Wentworth, wentworthj@parliament.uk or Sarah McKain, sarah@britishecologicalsociety.org