



AHRC-ESRC-FCO Knowledge Exchange Fellowship Scheme Q&A with Current Fellows

What's a typical day like in the FCO?

1. Obviously there is no typical day, but it might include meeting with colleagues who work on my area of expertise (Germany), speaking with a German think tank representative on a trip to London, ensuring I'm up to speed with what the media are saying about my areas of expertise, and completing a research note on an area of policy that has been commissioned by an Embassy.

2. I usually start the day by catching up with email from 'post' (the Harare embassy), which includes useful summaries of the news media and any other urgent queries, either from the wider group of analysts or related to my geographic and thematic responsibilities. Once a week we have a VTC with the embassy, where we catch up on what is happening, their assessment of the situation. I may attend or run a briefing session for outgoing embassy staff, or chair a session run by an invited academic expert, which contributes to professional development for my policy colleagues.

3. Days are very varied but might involve responding to emails on a pressing policy issue, working on a more in-depth research report, meetings with policy colleagues or other government departments, a VTC with an embassy, attending seminars with visiting speakers, or going to roundtables at London think-tanks.

What's a piece of work you've specially enjoyed or been proud of?

1. I was asked to identify stakeholders who would be able to shed light on a particular area of German domestic politics – I reached out to contacts, got the best list of people to approach that I could, drafted the emails, and joined in the meetings along with British Embassy representatives. We gained some great insights and had some excellent feedback, including from our Ambassador.

2. I particularly enjoyed organising a mini- 'away-day' in Oxford for three colleagues who were joining the Harare embassy. Because they all had quite strong grasp of the issues, we were able to have a very robust and enjoyable set of discussions with academic experts based there.

3. I contributed to the FCO's first podcast, on the role of China and Russia in Central Asia.



How have your research skills helped you to fill the role?

1. The FCO and other government officials seemed appreciative of the fact I've worked on German domestic politics for a long time, and bring strong language skills to the role. This, rather than more formal research skills, has proven most important.
2. I find I'm using my academic skills and contacts every day in different ways – much as I would do during an academic research project.
3. The most important skill is the ability to deploy your experience of your geographical region, including language skills, academic contacts, and knowledge of the most useful open-source materials.

How hard has it been to balance the demands of the fellowship with those of your University?

1. Both sides have been very understanding and supportive, and it's been possible to keep up with conferences, for example, quite well. The challenge is that the FCO does not close down during University vacation, so it is harder to take extended periods to focus on a particular piece of work. However, the Fellowship has offered some unique insights, so it is a really good investment of time which will bring benefits in the future.
2. I've found both institutions to be quite flexible, although it has required all me to deploy all my 'juggling' skills, especially at times when the University is particularly busy.
3. This is the biggest challenge for Fellows. There are many areas of overlap, and ultimately the cross-over is likely to be beneficial for research, but the two roles do require slightly different skill sets and a different focus. But both FCO and university have been extremely flexible, and that has helped enormously.

What's the main thing you've learned during the course of the fellowship?

1. Civil servants will appreciate very succinct, well-informed, precise work. Long messages with a high level of theoretical abstraction will not find much of an audience.
2. The questions that policy-makers ask are different from those that we ask as academics, but answering them requires much of the same knowledge and analytical skills.
3. I'm still learning, but I think beginning to understand the institutional complexity of foreign policy-making is really valuable.



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Would you recommend the fellowship and what advice would you offer to candidates?

1. I'd warmly recommend the fellowship for those with expertise in a particular area of policy. My advice would be to be confident about what you can offer – colleagues are very grateful for the insights that academics can bring to FCO work.
2. I'm very much enjoying the fellowship and benefitting from it, so would encourage others to apply, and indeed, have done so!
3. Yes, it's a great opportunity to understand how government works and the role of research and analysis in the process of policy-making.