Professional Fellowship Scheme

Guidance for participating organisations

2026-2027

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1. Introduction

As part of their well-established collaborative relationship, The National Archives and Research Libraries UK (RLUK) facilitate a Professional Fellowship Scheme to enable staff from both organisations, and for the first time, colleagues from the wider archive sector, to gain experience and insight from one another, strengthen and diversify the relationship between them, and to overcome some of the collective challenges facing research, and cultural organisations.

The scheme aligns itself with corporate aims and ambitions of The National Archives, as outlined in The National Archives' 2025-2030 strategy and Research Vision (2024-2027), and RLUK's 2026 – 2030 strategy , whilst also enabling personal development opportunities for the individuals involved. 2026/27 will be the eighth year of this collaborative scheme, and the first time in which the opportunity has been developed to include colleagues from the wider archive sector.

Professional Fellowships will be structured around a flexible, short-term visit to The National Archives, for Fellows from an RLUK member institution or eligible archive sector partner, and to an RLUK member institution, for Fellows from The National Archives or eligible archive sector partner, while being underpinned by a longer period of peer-to-peer mentoring and knowledge sharing. Depending on capacity within/across institutions, there may also be opportunities to visit relevant and eligible archival institutions throughout the course of the Fellowship.

Professional Fellowships should lead to tangible outcomes and deliverables that directly benefit the host organisation, contributing to its priorities and operations. They should also strengthen relationships between The National Archives, RLUK, and the wider archive sector, supporting collaboration, shared learning, and the exchange of expertise and best practice. Each fellowship will last for one year or up to 18 months

(part-time) and the selection and recruitment of the Fellows will be undertaken jointly between The National Archives and RLUK. A financial allocation will be made to support the work of Professional Fellows.

This document provides guidance for organisations participating in the Professional Fellowship scheme. It outlines the expected commitment of organisations hosting and sponsoring a Professional Fellow, and what organisations can expect from the scheme. It also outlines the role and responsibilities of mentors, who will be asked to support and supervise a visiting Fellow. This document should be read in conjunction with the *Professional Fellowship Scheme Guidance*, which includes further information about the scheme, its structure, and the expectations surrounding the work of individual Professional Fellows.

2. Sponsoring a Professional Fellow

Professional Fellowships are designed to be a supported and invaluable opportunity for an individual to undertake research and develop their skills, knowledge, and experience whilst still undertaking their substantive post within their home institution. They are not secondments, and it will be important that applicants discuss their proposed Fellowship with their line manager or head of department from the outset. The scheme encourages applicants to 'take ownership' of their Fellowship, tailoring it to a specific professional practice question, in support of their wider substantive role. Applicants should ensure that their Professional Fellowship will bring the greatest benefit to their own professional development (via their Continuous Professional Development Plan), their home organisation (through its contribution to wider pieces of work and their substantive role), and the wider library and archive sectors.

2.1. Role of a Sponsoring Organisation

The success of an individual Professional Fellowship will depend on the support and commitment of a Fellow's sponsoring organisation (i.e. the organisation from which they originate). Organisations should support staff in the development of their application to the scheme, ensuring that it supports them in their substantive role and professional development. If an applicant is successful, sponsoring organisations should ensure that staff have adequate time to undertake their Fellowship and that its findings and outcomes can be shared and embedded throughout the organisation.

2.2. Expectations and commitments of sponsoring organisations

In order to support the Fellow, sponsoring organisations should consider the following:

- *Adequate time allocation:* The time committed to each individual Fellowship will vary between Fellows and should be agreed between applicants and line managers. Adequate time should be allocated to the Fellowship's activities, including the residency period within another organisation (usually of around 2 weeks), and regular monitoring should be undertaken to ensure that this is sufficient. The allocation of sufficient time may require the temporary adjustment of an individual's roles and responsibilities within their substantive post during the period of the Fellowship. We would estimate that up to 10% of an individual's working time should be spent on Fellowship activities during the 12-month period of their Fellowship (full-time). If the Fellowship is conducted over an 18-month period (part-time), we estimate that approximately 5% of an individual's working time should be spent on Fellowship activities. It is worth noting that each individual Fellow will have a preference regarding how to allocate their time; this may be regular ring-fenced periods of time throughout

the duration of the Fellowship, or a more flexible approach that ensures they are able to progress reflexively alongside their business as usual. Line managers and mentors are encouraged to keep regular communication with Fellows to ensure they feel supported in allocating the appropriate time, or to help them prioritise their workloads (where necessary). Please note that scheme representatives will keep in regular contact with mentors and line managers to ensure that Fellows are supported appropriately throughout the duration of the Fellowship.

- *Residency and leave allocation:* We would expect that sponsoring organisations treat the period a Professional Fellow spends 'on residency' within another organisation as work time and thus not require the Fellow to take this time as leave. We suggest that the residency period lasts for around 2 weeks. However, Fellows and host organisations should discuss this residency period and may find it more beneficial to visit over a more extended period (for example, 1 day a week over several weeks) or follow a hybrid approach.
- *Inclusion within performance objectives:* A Professional Fellowship will be a substantial undertaking. We encourage the inclusion of the Fellowship's activities within the performance objectives of individual Fellows and suggest that this forms another layer of monitoring of the Fellowship's progress.
- *Dissemination and wider benefit:* line managers and applicants should consider how the findings and experiences of the Fellowship will be shared and disseminated within their organisation for the greatest benefit. This may include blogs, podcasts, publications, presentations or other forms of outreach activity. Please note that the Professional Fellowship Board will also suggest relevant outputs and activities and will encourage Fellows to consider these. This may require additional support from colleagues at host and sponsoring organisations.

If sponsoring organisations have any queries regarding the commitment a Professional Fellowship might represent, they are encouraged to contact the scheme representative for either RLUK members or The National Archives, given in *Section 8: Further Information* (below).

3. Hosting a Professional Fellow

One of the key components of the Professional Fellowship Scheme is a short-term residency within an organisation that is not the Fellow's home institution. Depending on where the Fellow originates from (i.e. their home organisation), this will be a short-term residency within The National Archives (for Fellows from an RLUK member or an eligible archive partner) or at an RLUK member (for Fellows from The National Archives or an eligible archive partner). It is intended that both the Fellow and host organisation will derive significant benefits from the Professional Fellowship Scheme.

The envisaged benefits include:

- Raising of their respective profiles as centres of expertise;
- Enable the opening of new strategic conversations that may not otherwise occur;
- Identify new potential partnerships for joint initiatives for their respective services;
- Improving organisational processes and procedures through engaging in critical friendship and their contextualisation within a wider setting.

It is in everyone's interest that the short-term residencies associated with a Professional Fellowship proceed as smoothly as possible. In hosting a Professional Fellow, the host organisation therefore has a number of responsibilities to the Fellow, which are detailed below.

3.1. Role of the Host Organisation

It is the role of the host organisation to provide an embedded professional experience to the Professional Fellow within their organisation. For the 2026/27 scheme, host organisations will include RLUK member institutions or The National Archives, although there may be opportunities to also engage with relevant archive services (with support from The National Archives in facilitating).

The host organisation should support the Fellow in enabling them to place their practice and expertise within a wider organisational and professional environment. In order to do so effectively, it is expected that the host organisation will:

- Provide a named mentor within the organisation who will be responsible for liaising with the Professional Fellow throughout their Fellowship and on the approach to, and throughout, their residency. Mentors should also nominate a colleague at the host organisation who will serve as a 'critical friend' during the Fellowship and who can take over as mentor in the event they are unable to fulfil this role (e.g. due to ill health or if they leave the organisation before the end of the Fellowship);
- Provide appropriate desk space and resources to enable the Fellow to work within the organisation during their residency;
- Arrange the necessary security clearances and checks in order to provide the Professional Fellow with access to buildings and resources required for their residency;
- Allow sufficient time within staff schedules to enable the Professional Fellow to meet with relevant colleagues in support of their Fellowship;
- Provide a safe and welcoming environment in which the Fellow can work.

If a potential host organisation has any queries or questions regarding their role within a potential Professional Fellowship, they should contact their scheme representatives named in *Section 8: Further Information*, below.

4. Guidance for Mentors

One of the key features of the Professional Fellowship scheme is the allocation of a named mentor to support the Fellow throughout their Fellowship. A definition of this position is given below:

Mentors: are responsible for the support and peer mentoring of a Professional Fellow within another organisation. They do not participate in the CPD elements of the scheme or a residency in an organisation outside their own. Being a mentor therefore allows an individual to participate in the Professional Fellowship Scheme without the commitment of being a Fellow. They are expected to facilitate and support a Professional Fellow's residency within their organisation.

Mentors are to support a Professional Fellow in the development of their professional practice project over the course of the Fellowship. This will include offering peer support and mentoring. In doing so, Mentors are expected to:

- *Be in regular contact:* Mentors and Fellows should be in regular contact throughout the period of the Fellowship. We would recommend that Fellows and Mentors arrange regular virtual, telephone or face-to-face catch-ups every month (as a minimum) or more often as required and based on the individual needs of the Fellow. These should increase in their regularity on the approach to the Fellow's residency in the host organisation to ensure maximum benefit.
- *Facilitated residency:* Mentors will be responsible for arranging and facilitating the residency of the Fellow within their own organisation. This will include

ensuring that appropriate security checks and clearances have been secured for the visiting Professional Fellow, resources (e.g. desk space) have been allocated, and a programme of activity has been developed (aligned to the professional practice question addressed by the Fellowship).

- *Time allocation:* Mentors should allocate adequate time to support a visiting Fellow. The time required to do this will vary depending on the nature and intended outcome of their Professional Fellowship and the timing and contents of their residency. Mentors should discuss the time commitment required for these elements with their line manager and head of department, and where appropriate, have this responsibility included within their performance objectives.

If Mentors have any queries or questions regarding their role within the Professional Fellowship Scheme, they should raise these with the scheme representatives named in *Section 8: Further Information*, below.

5. Financial allocation

Following the success of their stage two, full application, Professional Fellows will be awarded a financial allocation of £1,500. These funds will not be held by the Fellow but will be held centrally and administered by RLUK on behalf of the scheme. They are designed to limit the financial burden on participating organisations.

This allocation is to support the Fellow for the duration of the Fellowship and can be used for the following:

- *Travel and Subsistence:* To support the Professional Fellow in their travel and subsistence when undertaking their residency at their host organisation. Travel and subsistence bookings will be supported by RLUK. Questions

relating to travel and subsistence bookings should be directed to: melanie.cheung@rluk.ac.uk, RLUK, Executive Assistant.

- *Other Fellowship expenses:* To cover other expenses in support of the Professional Fellowship (e.g. to buy resources, attend a course or workshop, or to support the delivery of outreach activity). Such claims should be agreed with the sponsoring institution and the Professional Fellowship Scheme representative before payment is made.

The financial allocation should not be spent on any other activities without the permission of the Fellowship Board. Any remaining allowance can be used by the Professional Fellow for dissemination and engagement purposes up to 3 months after the official end of the Fellowship. If additional finance is required to support the Fellow's activities, applications should be made to their sponsoring (home) organisation through established channels.

As Mentors will not engage in the majority of Fellowship activities (e.g. a residency, CPD activities) and their role is largely restricted to the peer mentoring and facilitating a Fellow's residency within their institution, no monies have been allocated to them within the scheme.

6. Monitoring and Support of Professional Fellows

6.1. Monitoring

The progress made by Professional Fellows against the aims and objectives of their Fellowship should be monitored over the duration of the Fellowship. Details of how Professional Fellowships should be monitored are given within the *Professional Fellowship Scheme Guidance, Section 6.2.*

Line managers and Mentors should regularly review the progress of the Fellowship against its stated aims and objectives. The success of a Fellowship will be judged against these, as given within the Fellow's initial application. If the aims and objectives of a Fellowship need to be modified or changed over its duration, these should be discussed with a Fellow's line manager, Mentor, and their scheme's representative given in *Section 8*.

6.2. Completion of a Professional Fellowship

The success of a Professional Fellowship will be judged against its aims and outputs, as stated within the Fellow's application, or those agreed during the duration of the Fellowship. The comments of the Fellow themselves and their line manager will be taken into account when assessing the Fellowship, in addition to any outputs/ documentation produced. Comments will also be sought from Mentors and Fellows as further context. Following successful completion, Fellows will be awarded a certificate of completion on behalf of The National Archives and RLUK, which can act as evidence of a successfully completed Fellowship.

6.3. Grievance procedure

If any party, whether the Fellow, line manager, or Mentor have concerns regarding the progress or nature of a Professional Fellowship, the concerned party should raise it with the other parties at the soonest possible moment, as well as with their scheme representative where appropriate. Wherever possible, issues and difficulties should be resolved informally between parties or within the established grievance procedures of the Fellow's sponsoring organisation. If, for whatever reason, these cannot be resolved, a Professional Fellowship can be terminated.

7. Termination of a Professional Fellowship

A Professional Fellowship can be terminated by the Professional Fellow or their line manager by their making a request, in writing, to the scheme board given in *Section 6.2* of the *Professional Fellowship Scheme Guidance* via their scheme representative detailed in *Section 8, Further Information,* below. This request should include the reasons for termination and the efforts made to resolve any issues encountered. Where appropriate, a request may be made to the Fellow's sponsoring organisation for the repayment of monies allocated to the Fellow up to that point.

8. Further information

For further information, please see the scheme's guidance material or FAQ document. If you are considering an application and would like to discuss this further, you may also contact your scheme representative:

For colleagues at a Research Libraries UK member:
Dr Christina Kamposiori, Executive Programme Officer, Research Libraries UK
christina.kamposiori@rluk.ac.uk

For colleagues at The National Archives:
Dr Mollie Clarke, Academic Engagement Manager, The National Archives
Mollie.clarke@nationalarchives.gov.uk

For colleagues from the archives sector
David Morris, Head of Regions and Networks, The National Archives
David.morris@nationalarchives.gov.uk