Call for Understanding Society Research Data Fellowships

Deadline 5pm on 25th October 2021.

Understanding Society is one of the largest household panel studies in the world and a major infrastructure investment for UK health and social sciences. By enabling researchers to track individuals over time, the data can be used to assess the causes and consequences of change in individuals’ circumstances (such as the birth of a child, marriage, separation, retirement) for themselves and their families (e.g. poverty, income, health, parenting). It also allows researchers and policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of issues such as poverty, unemployment or mental health, by allowing researchers to examine whether conditions are persistent or transitory. The data is also amenable to evaluating policy change as before and after measures are reported at the individual and household level. At the same time, Understanding Society provides significant opportunities for methodological research. This has often been focused on formal experiments carried on the Innovation Panel, but there are many opportunities for methodological research on the main survey as a result of changes in design over time (e.g. changing modes due to the pandemic).

The Understanding Society Fellowship Programme enables researchers to take time out to focus on research projects based on the Study’s data. Funding is available for 12-month Fellowships to undertake a project based on Understanding Society data, with additional resource for follow up dissemination and impact generation activities. Practical support will also be available from the Study team, for example, to advise on data and analysis plans and communication and impact strategies. Each Fellowship call has a specific theme; previous rounds have included a focus on our biomarker and genetics data, methodological research on representativeness, and policy focused projects. Details of Fellowships awarded in previous rounds can be found here. The 2021 call focuses on two themes: event history data and mixed mode measurement. We will announce the topic of the 2022
call in due course, our preliminary plans are that it will focus on family research and projects based on linked administrative data.

**Requirements of a Fellowship**

Specifically in this round of funding we are seeking applications on two themes:

**Event histories** – *Understanding Society* collects data on key events in people's lives annually in the questionnaire on topics such as employment, partnership, health, fertility, residential moves, political allegiances. For some key topics complete histories of data are collected retrospectively as well. This means researchers can build a picture of the full histories of different domains of people’s lives, enabling them to examine trajectories and how they interact over the life course, as well as factors that cause turning points or interrupt them. Information on some of the event history datafiles already created is being showcased at an [event on 29th September](#). We would welcome Fellowship applications based on the Study's event history data to address important social and economic questions about long and short run changes in people’s lives. This research should be based on new event history data that you construct from the existing data files for the project. Once you have completed your research project, we would be keen to work with you to turn your datafile into a shareable data product for the Study. We would like to discuss with you what this involves and any additional funding that might be required to achieve this.

**Mixed mode measurement** – Since Wave 5 in the Innovation Panel and Wave 7 on the main survey, we have collected data via sequential mixed mode (face-to-face, web and telephone). This provides participants with choices about how to complete the survey, reduces costs, and in 2020 when the pandemic hit, allowed us to continue collecting data seamlessly without face-to-face interviews. Research has been carried out on the measurement issues associated with mixed mode data collection, which we have used in the survey design to minimise mode effects. The research that has already been done with the Study on mixed mode data collection can be found [here](#). However, we feel there is
much more that we, and our data users, need to know about the effects of mode of response on measures of change and stability in key domains across the Study and between different sub-groups within the Study. Until the pandemic, both the innovation panel and main survey have included a random sample issued face-to-face since mixed mode data collection was introduced, creating significant opportunities for investigating these issues in a range of ways. In addition, the mid-wave changes in mode in 2020, with the suspension of face-to-face interviewing affecting Waves 11,12 and 13, create unique opportunities to further explore these effects. By the end of this year Wave 11 and year 1 of Wave 12 (within the 2020 data release) will be available as well as IP13 which was conducted in 2020. We would welcome Fellowship applications that create new insights on mixed mode measurement issues and provide advice to Understanding Society users on how to manage these in their analyses.

For all projects the following outputs are required:

- The syntax you have written for your project, which if appropriate and acknowledging your authorship, would be shared on the Study website and/or used to create new datafiles for the Study.
- An Understanding Society working paper which summarises your methodological approach.
- An Understanding Society blog or podcast summarising your Fellowship.

Additionally, of course, we expect that you will submit your research to peer review journals and present it at relevant conferences.

On all topics we particularly welcome projects that also aim to actively promote policy learning, with additional funding would be available for such activities, including beyond the end date of the fellowship if helpful. Fellowship that wish to pursue policy engagement for their project will be supported by the Understanding Society Policy and Partnership Unit to engage widely with policy makers, including Understanding Society’s co-funder group, and work with them to disseminate findings and generate impact.
Fellows will be required to attend two meetings with other Fellows and Understanding Society team members during their Fellowship to share early findings and received feedback and support, and a final public workshop at which they will present their findings. Communication and impact plans will reviewed and discussed with each Fellow at the first Fellowship network meeting. To facilitate sharing among Fellows, Fellowships under this call should begin in January or April 2022.

**Selection Criteria and Eligibility**

Applications will be assessed on the basis of their scientific merit and potential to enhance the usefulness of the Study as a research resource and/or generate policy impact. Any researcher based in a higher education institution is eligible to apply (except the University of Essex), but people can only have an Understanding Society Fellowship once, so previously successful applicants should not apply. We welcome applications from researchers at any career stage. Early careers researchers (ECRs, < 3 years post PhD) should identify a mentor in their own institution.

Funding will be provided for the Fellow’s salary, including NI and pension costs for up to 12 months (full or part time). The planned project must be achievable in the timescale of the project, and the application should demonstrate this. As noted above, we would be happy to discuss additional funding/time after the completion of the main Fellowship to promote policy impact or create a well-documented shareable event history data file.

**How do I apply?**

People wishing to be considered for a Fellowship under this call should apply using the application form by 5pm on 25th October 2021. You are strongly advised to discuss your ideas with a member of the Understanding Society team in advance of submitting your application. Please contact Victoria Nolan vlnolan@essex.ac.uk in the first instance who will put you in touch with the appropriate person to discuss your ideas with you. Please feel free to seek guidance on the scientific direction of your proposal, data issues, communication and impact plans as well as practical queries. A signed statement of support from your Head of Department must be included.
The timeline for this Fellowship call is set out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date/Period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advert</td>
<td>15th September</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing date (6 weeks)</td>
<td>25th October</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notify if shortlisted (or not)</td>
<td>Week of 8th November</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Week of 22nd November</td>
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<td>Notify</td>
<td>By end November</td>
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<tr>
<td>Possible start (term notice?)</td>
<td>January or April 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kick-off Fellowship meeting</td>
<td>End-Jan / End-Apr 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work-in-progress workshop</td>
<td>July/October 2022</td>
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<td>End of project event</td>
<td>Dec 22 / Mar 23</td>
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**Application guidelines**

1. Details of all researchers involved in the project should be provided. This must include the applicant for the Fellowship. If you are an early career researcher (<3 years post PhD) a mentor from your host institution should also be included on the project and they should write a supporting statement.

2. Please provide a short title for the project. A list of Fellows, their project titles and, in time, outputs will be added to the Study website.

3. Please provide an executive summary of no more than 250 words. This should provide an overview of the proposed project including how it will contribute to informing policy, and to social science research.

4. Please outline (max 250 words) how your Fellowship will add value to *Understanding Society* (value added data, methodological understanding, policy engagement, highlighting unique features of the Study etc.).

5. Please provide a brief summary of your own expertise in relation to delivering the project and support you may need from your host institution or the *Understanding Society* team.
6. Outline your project plan. You should have clearly specified research question, methods, analysis and impact and dissemination plans (max 2 sides).

7. Please detail your plans for dissemination, knowledge exchange and for generating impact. You should indicate who your main audiences will be and what activities you will undertake in order to disseminate your findings to them. Any specific costs associated with these activities should be identified, except open access publication which should be covered by your own institution.

8. Please describe your project milestones and the deliverables you will achieve at the end of months 3, 6, 9 and 12. Final payments will only be made upon delivery of the required outputs set out at the top of page 3. If you are proposing additional work beyond your Fellowship period to promote impact or develop a shareable datasets please clearly identify relevant additional milestones.

9. Provide an estimate of costs produced by your host HEI finance office. These should include the Fellowship salary, NI and pension contribution. Staff costs are funded at 100% but we cannot cover indirects. The Fellowships fund your own salary costs if you have a research-only contract or for those on research and teaching contracts, the salary costs (normally starting at the most junior point of the lecturer scale at the institution concerned) of an individual to undertake the normal duties of the applicant for the duration of the Fellowship. Other costs necessary to complete your Fellowship for example, travel, training, conference attendance and knowledge exchange activities should be clearly articulated and justified in the proposal. The Fellowship can last up to 12 months, full or part time. Dissemination and knowledge exchange activities, or additional work to create shareable well documented datasets, can be funded for up to 12 months after the completion of your Fellowship. These should be discussed with us in advance of completing your application and separately identified in the application form.

The maximum budget per Fellowship is £70,000 for staff and dissemination related-costs.
10. Please provide a supporting statement from your host organisation. This should be from a senior member of staff. This statement should outline the organisation’s commitment to the project, detailing the resources that will be provided and the support that will be given to Fellows.

11. Please attach a two page CV.

Assessing applications
External peer reviews of the Fellowship applications will be undertaken, and shortlisted applicants will be invited to discuss their proposals with the team. The criteria against which applications will be judged are:

- Does the Fellowship project have clear aims?
- Does the application clearly demonstrate the scientific benefits of the proposal?
- Are the proposed research methods appropriate for the aims of the Fellowship?
- Does the project add value to the Understanding Society resource?
- Does the project have an appropriate dissemination and knowledge exchange plan?
- Are the milestones and overall project goals realistic and achievable in the timeframe?
- Are the costs justified? Does the project represent value for money?
- For early career researchers, is there sufficient support in place for the Fellow?

Please send your completed form together with a 2-page CV to Victoria Nolan vinolan@essex.ac.uk by 5pm on 25th October 2021.