**Transcript PAF 3**

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
I'll just explain a little bit about myself. I'm at the Open University and I'm doing a Parliamentary Academic Fellowship at the Knowledge Exchange Unit. And what I'm looking at is, is reviewing the Parliamentary Academic Fellowship scheme, looking at ways it might be improved and getting experiences of former PAFs.

Identifying marks will be removed from the transcript, right, and probably also remove locations which offices you work people worked in to stop people being identified. So it'll all be anonymized and what I might do is send you a transcript in advance, and if there's anything you want cut out of it, just let me know.

PAF 3  
Yeah, that's fine.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Alright, so we'll kick off then. Basically it's going to be in about 3 different stages.   
Yep, your fellowship. A few questions about the actual fellowship itself. And then some questions about after and post-POST as it were.

Just thinking back about when you applied for the fellowship, how was the process? How did you find the process?

PAF 3  
Incredibly simple. Very straight forward and one of the things that I did notice is that the written brief also followed the sort of verbal and interactive process so everyone from POST’s end and the host followed the brief and it just made the preparation for me easy. It just made it the whole process feel like someone had actually sat down and planned it, you know?

It followed exactly the format which was good for me as a user.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And can you remember when you applied roughly?

PAF 3  
Yeah. It was COVID I. It was. Yeah, it was in the round of. 2019 and I think the application date had to be in in June. Seems rings a bell and then so it's just before COVID.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Okay right.

PAF 3  
And I'm pretty sure the application had to be in. No, hang on a minute. No, cause those interviews were online. Yeah, there's a thought.

Um might been 2020 that COVID's really knocked everybody. No, just thinking cause I did the interviews online. Why would I have done that? Maybe it was easy. No, I tell you what I think it was June 19. And so the application had been in June 19, there were following interviews, pretty sure around about October 19. Yes, I got it right now. It was alright at 19 and then found out around about early December.

And then it was. When do you want to start the fellowship? And I said January 2020. And of course, not long after that, it all kicked off. So it was. June 19.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did you manage to visit the estate?

PAF 3  
No, no. Well, during the during the PAF in just once in the project delivery, which was the pretty short, is the very first or the second day that the estate was open. We did have a hybrid event and then a visited this day in the following September.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
But during the course of the fellowship, was it mostly remote?

PAF 3  
Yeah, fortunately, yeah. Well, actually, I say unfortunately because, you know you want to get up there. And when I was actually up there last week, I'm actually signed up for a tour of Parliament. No, I did get a quick tour. Do you know, we sort of whizzed around and it probably took about 15 minutes.

But I was up last week doing something. I thought I'm going to sign up for a tour just to experience what I probably should have got. It was really interesting.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
All right. Um, that's interesting, but for the bulk of fellowship it was online. Did you have an induction plan?

PAF 3  
Yes, it did. Yeah, yeah. There was induction meet other PAFs go through various training courses as part of the sort of onboarding scheme.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
How useful was it the induction?

PAF 3  
To, to be honest, it felt fairly standard as any organisation, to be honest, if it looked a lot of the resources are online and you had to work your way through them. The videos on various things and security and so yeah, it just felt like any other place, to be honest.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Do you have any thoughts about what might be included in an induction for PAFs?

PAF 3  
Yeah, it was really difficult because the again it was remote and it would have been nice to meet the other PAFs.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Right.

PAF 3  
Oh and whilst POST, actually I don't know if it's still exists or whether it just existed for COVID, but there was an online forum where PAFs could come in and say this is what I'm doing: ‘Hi, I'm XXXX, this is what I'm doing’. So, I actually don't recall meeting really any other PAFs. There was the odd message board.

What would have been not just nice to sort of see that what they were doing and equally to sort of build a that sort of network of people to find out what they're up to.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
OK what about parliamentary supervision?

PAF 3  
What do you mean by that question?

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Right. Did you have a supervisor?

PAF 3  
Yes.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And what are those? Did you have meetings? How was your interaction like?

PAF 3  
Oh yeah … She was seconded to the House of Commons Library, which is where I did a lot of the placement. She was absolutely top drawer. She was absolutely brilliant. I mean, she was really into agile management and project management.

And if I had it I could show you, but I was allowed to disseminate it after it was cause I do talk to other universities and this university about the process and that promote it and this is how and I'm actually got. A screenshot of a graph that we actually had where she actually had every meeting date time, what we're going to talk about and she had that mapped out.

And at times I thought God doesn't give me what much wiggle room, but actually apart from, she was very good at what she did, particularly in that remote situation it just meant that you weren't drifting, so I actually met at every week for 15 minutes and then every month for one hour. As a minimum, that was.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Okay so you saw your supervisor throughout.

PAF 3  
Yes. Yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Right. And just thinking about the work itself. And what did you understand by impartiality when you were doing your fellowship?

PAF 3  
A lot. But because you can't move in Parliament without it being mentioned. In actual fact, the project that I ran, impartiality was one of the key sort of variables that we looked at.

I had to make sure that we had, we addressed it and I wrote up with my supervisor and my host, an academic paper about that, and I had to go through, I think 3 clearances through different boards about the wording about how I use impartiality and some of those words were sort of, you know, changed, edited or whatever else. So yeah, I understand a lot about it. It was a key feature of.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Was it different between your academic work and your parliamentary work?

PAF 3  
Um, not really because you know, obviously it's a social scientist. You're trying to be impartial. He's trying to be objective. In terms of that and you're trying to let the data do the talking for you. So in that sense it didn't really seem that much of a leap for me.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And do you have social media?

PAF 3  
Yeah, little bits.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
You have a Twitter account, anything like that?

PAF 3  
Barely use it, yeah

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
I'm just wondering if you were given advice on how academics manage impartiality between, say?

PAF 3  
It's a real tightrope, that one. And my way of looking at it is, I wrote a research paper on this a long time ago, and it's really well cited and it's looking at the consequences of your research and what you say.

And it's looking at the different types of sort of ethical steps that you can actually take to minimise the consequences in in terms of parliamentary environment and process, they know more about their view of impartiality than I do. So I was quite happy to go along with pretty much everything that they said.

And they said, yeah, we need to put this through clearances. That's fine. Those are your clearances there, your procedures, would we do the same thing again in, in academic publishing? Yes, we do, because we've still got to sign off things like ethics, conflicts of interest etcetera. So it's not really a big leap between the two. I think it's just perhaps just an emphasis on what it means in different contexts.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
OK. That's useful just spooling back to your experience. Just thinking about, I mean you mentioned a message board with other PAFs. What if would you give any advice for the kind of if someone was coming in new today?

The best way to support PAFs during the project when I'm thinking of the blend of face to face or hybrid.

PAF 3  
Yeah, I mean I think a hybrid does work well. The project that I ran with the House of Commons library, I've run numerous projects like that in industry for the last 15-16 years. OK, so I'm really experienced at that, but what this particular PAF gave me was a new way of thinking, a new way of working, primarily because it was driven by COVID.

And therefore everything had to be done remotely. But actually when, when I, even at the time, you know, I'll make sort of reflective notes when I have meetings as well. I met far more people online in a more expedient fashion as and I didn't have to get them down to the train to London all the time, which is which is where my mindset would have been.

Had it not been Covid, right, jump on a train, government, see three people in a day. Come back up. Jump again. Actually, I saw far more people online, so therefore it's it was far more productive in that sense.

One of the things equally that was very different in Parliament and it didn't really strike me until I sort of in it is it is that all the people I'm working with all like to vote.

And they all like to vote on something, and they therefore it's a very democratic environment to work in. And that took a lot longer, whereas the same projects in industry probably would have taken me half a day. It was close to our reckon about 12 weeks.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Wow, OK.

PAF 3  
Yeah, simply because of the range of voting that had to happen, you know, just.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
When you say rounds of voting, you mean people pitching them with your opinions?

PAF 3  
It's voting on something. So, we'd have a list of variables which ones are the most important. OK, let's reduce them, literally voting, where as an industry you get to that point incredibly quickly.

I came from industry into academia and I've always worked with industry on every single project and paper. I've always done it it's working in collaboration with industry partners so I've always think about blending theory and practise together.

What are the learnings from that voting experience actually? Um, just maybe it's worth trying in certain contexts again. In future projects it might be a way to pre plan a project where actually you get the body of work done and instead of taking say 12 weeks it probably would take a lot a lot quicker and a lot shorter in industry but it could be a more robust way of looking at it.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
So would that be a streamline of how things are done?

PAF 3  
I think it's it. It's probably a process where there's more of an audit trial that happens over several rounds of voting rather than half an afternoon in a workshop with industry executives who go, yeah, let's do this. And then you move on. There's no real sort of audit trail with that stuff.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
So which do you prefer, which you think's better?

PAF 3  
Yeah, I think it's contextual. I actually really embrace the parliamentary thing once it got my head round it that everybody votes on everything. It was quite unique to me, but then there must be other areas that all other businesses that that actually would embrace that so you know, I did learn something about a pretty standardised process that I'd run for many years about how I could actually improve it and think about where I could take it next.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And how important would you say face to face is?

PAF 3  
In terms of well, in terms of the project I was running, as I said, look, we can do a lot of this online and we can get it done. But the main sort of workshop that we run has to be face to face. There's absolutely no way that we can actually run this even as hybrid. They try to set it up as a hybrid to try and include people. It didn't work and we need to face to face which is why I'm pretty sure it's the first or second day back from Covid.

And they equally said, right, we know what you're talking about. There's no way we could have done that online. Hybrid. So it had to be face to face.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Why would it only work face to face?

PAF 3  
It's an interactive workshop and it's brainstorming and you know you can't rely on technology to do that so. It was all it was all about developing future scenarios and that happens really in a dialogue where you're actually brainstorming and sense checking ideas and moving on.

I had a long time collaborator from industry also come in to help me run the workshops. It tells you that two people had to be there to, to actually get that right. So that was the real face to face. Bit of that process. And that's when I got my quick tour around Parliament, the committee rooms.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Okay brilliant and we kind of ripping through these questions. Just thinking about you kind of post POST period, right as it were and do you know any outcomes or impacts of the kind of work you did?

PAF 3  
Yeah, sure. I'm really into research impact always have been had a measure. It. Yeah, had a really get this worked with big companies, international companies, American, US. So my whole mindset is it's just not the project, it's the impact, the outcomes and the outputs from that so.

I've been doing it for 20 years. It's unusual in the academic environment. Put it that way. So in my mind, I knew what I was going to measure as we go along in terms of that, so in in terms of outputs.

What I also said was, if possible, I'd like to write this this process up as an academic article and they said more than happy. We'd like you to do that, but we actually need to go through the various clearances. So we've done that. Downloads are going really well on it in terms of that. So that was another output. I'm also tracking in terms of the House of Commons library.

And I'll probably do that again one year hence after that and then probably leave it at that, you know it will be written up as a ref impact case study.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
If your supervisor has left, who your contacts now? I mean, have you got other contacts then?

PAF 3  
Yeah. The director of the House of Commons library, he was relatively new in in terms of that. So don't imagine he's going to go too quickly in terms of that. We're still in contact, ‘How's it going, etcetera?’. One on my other contacts is in marketing, communications department. She's also left.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Just thinking about within your own university. How they been about your PAF?

PAF 3  
Yeah. I mean start with it was scratch your head. We've never had a PAF. No one's ever done it. You know, they weren't even sure if it was any. If it was something that was good or not, they just had no experience.

So in the end the knowledge exchange team was really helpful for releasing some money for me to, you know, hotel travel and all that type of stuff to do it and also sort of connecting me with things like university policy, network and some other areas. So they were incredibly helpful and now people are starting to go. And I have mentored someone else at the university who now who's got a successful PAF there. They're in place now.

So yeah, I think there's so slowly getting round to the fact that actually it could be a useful what you know, engagement with policymakers.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And how is it and impacted on your own career or academic work?

PAF 3  
So in one of my sort of online meetings during the orientation, he mentioned something I said, OK well that's interesting cause I'm actually doing this. So why don't we get together and see if we can sort of help push your policy along and you can help me understand the parliamentary context. So that sort of partnership worked really well. So ultimately his policy was signed off.

But also, you know, expanding the network that I've got so it has opened up more opportunities for me which is really good.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Okay.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Do you see any shortcomings, shortfalls in the PAF scheme from your experience?

Yeah, I did. It's funny because I'm sure I've had this this interview with someone else as well. How's the PAF going? How did it go? Aren't maybe it was just an exit interview

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Was that an exit interview? This isn't an exit interview.

PAF 3  
I'm not even sure to be honest. What did I say to them?

And again, I understand that resource issues inside the knowledge exchange unit and understand post COVID, but actually one once it was the end of it, it was the end of it.

I think equally the fact that we didn't really develop that PAF network through you know why wider engagement. I would like to have seen other PAFs over the years. And then I love collaboration. I like collaborating with people. So I'm always looking for. Yeah, that sounds interesting. Let's see what we can do something together.

So yeah, sort of a continuation I think would be the downside. It just seemed like there was nothing there, it was just it's over, yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
OK. And then just final question then that's useful and well. I guess it can anticipate some of that is that if you were going come up with just a couple of points about how it might be improved?

PAF 3  
Yeah, one is to have a network that that you can allow people to get engaged. So you did get a sense of more about what people are doing and how they're doing it, what the outcome was.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Yeah. And would you see an alumnus network being part of that?

PAF 3  
That would be brilliant. Again, it comes back to who are they? What have they done and what looks interesting that that I could put, you know, perhaps get engaged in or find out more about that. That would be brilliant if that could be actually done.