**Transcript Host 2**

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
I'm at the Open University, and I'm doing a review of the Parliament Academic Fellowship Scheme at the Knowledge Exchange Unit, interviewing former PAFs. And you are the first Parliamentary host I've interviewed.

Host 2  
Oh okay gosh, a bit of pressure.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Not at all, no pressure. It's basically just to get an idea of what you think about the scheme? How could it be improved and so on. All identifying marks will be removed from the transcript, so everything will be anonymous, it won't refer to particular offices.

My plan is probably to send you a transcript in advance so you can have a look and if there's anything you want cut out from it let me know.

Host 2  
Yeah, I don't think it's anything massively controversial or anything is going to be sensitive in my discussion. Lovely. Great stuff. Thanks.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Basically it's just done in three bits. The pre fellowship stage, during the Fellowship and the kind of post POST period.

If you can cast your mind back and how can you remember how the process of our advertising, the short listing for the fellowship was like?

Host 2  
Yeah, well it was actually a colleague of mine who did the initial kind of administration around the kind of advertising. I was involved, but that was sort of, one step removed. So this was XXX who actually went on maternity leave fairly shortly after our fellow arrived. And I then sort of took over.

My memory is a little bit sketchy about how the whole process started off, whether it was. I mean presumably it was something that I think the Knowledge Exchange Unit would have flagged. You know that there was an opportunity to bid for an academic fellow and you know for the we should think about you know what kind of areas it might be useful to have one. And I'm sure we would have thought about, you know what, what areas would be useful to have some kind of academic insights on?

And I threw in a request on XXX as being a good area that we could for some sort of specialist expertise on.

I think it was the first time anyone in our team had and so you know there were sort of you know definitely felt like there was probably for what we were used to in the library, it felt like quite kind of bureaucratic process in terms of, you know, filling out paperwork and filling out forms sort of saying, you know what, what the aims and objectives were.

I think other than to filling in that paperwork, I think probably the Knowledge Exchange Unit, the people running the scheme in POST probably did most of the most of the practicalities of reaching out to different universities.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
OK. When your colleague left, you were designated as the Parliamentary supervisor?

Host 2  
That's exactly. That's right. Actually, that was pretty early on in the fellowship. I think in total it was a year and a half in total and so yeah, the large majority of that I was the supervisor for the fellow.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did you have an induction plan for the fellow?

Host 2  
Yes, I think we did. And again this is where my sort of involvement was perhaps slightly at one, one step removed and we certainly did various kind of induction kind of type activities with our, with our POST fellow. The again slight complicating factor here was it was in the middle of lockdown. So we didn't actually see XXX in person for some time after the fellowship started.

But yes, there was, you know, certainly be certainly within the library, there was the usual kind of making sure she was up, you know, she was able to access the various kind of IT system she needed to. She have attended various kind of bits of training that new staff would attend.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
So at what point did you did you? You said you did meet face to face at some point.

Host 2  
Well, we did, yes, we, but it was some months afterwards after the start of the fellowship.

My memory of that so that I could have looked up the timings a bit more, but it was probably there was probably four or five months into the fellowship.

She worked one day a week when she was based with us and I think the expectation probably at the outset was that she would be coming down once a month or to Westminster … But it was less frequent than that because of the various kind of moving in and out of different restrictions.

And one of the things we'll come on to talk about, a guess is that we extended the fellowship and by I think it was initially for six months, we extended it for a further year and that gave XXX the opportunity to come to Westminster more often because we were sort coming out of these restrictions, um so that so that was really useful.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Do you have suggestions based on your experience of things that should be included in the induction for PAFs?

Host 2  
I think ideally you would have some, you know, more in person contacts. While you can do lots of things over Teams it would be better for fellowships to have some kind of in person time in the office I think just getting us a sense of the working environment and meeting other people

This is rather specific to the kind of circumstances rather than the kind of general points about fellowships, but we quickly developed a good and close working relationship with our fellow I think it probably took her longer to get to know the wider team but also people working in other subject areas of the library, people in in the committee office. I think it probably took her longer to get to know those groups.

And I think often opportunities can arise out of those out of those contacts as well. So I think that's probably one of the positives for us in the eventually we've been partly because of I think down to the fact we had a very good fellow. She did make the most of these opportunities and picked up other bits of work that we hadn't really initially envisaged when she would.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
OK. Just picking up on that, what would be the best way of supporting fellows during the fellowship, what would be the kind of ideal pattern?

Host 2  
Yeah, I think definitely regular catch ups, I mean both in terms of just inviting the fellow along to any kind of routine catch ups that you, and then again talking about the specifics of our case mean within the XXX team and the library.

I think having kind of regular one to one catch ups. Now trying to think what are schedule was for those but I think at least once a month, but I suspect probably it was more like once a week or once every couple of weeks, having a kind of one to one chat with the fellow is making sure that you know they were happy with what they were working on both in terms of the immediate kind of work that that week, but also you know that they would get what they wanted out of the fellowship and then it was working for both parties.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And what about the blend between hybrid online and face to face. Do you have any views on that?

Host 2  
I mean, say, much of our work now is sort of hybrid um. I think even the majority of our contacts I've used Teams or online it is fine. I think you know, we're all much more used to kind of video meetings like this one. And I thought for me that I think for academic fellow that that worked fine. We were happy with that worked pretty well.

But it is useful I think to have face to face, and I would say probably once a month is a good amount, particularly if it is not a full time thing. I imagine these things are less than full time and if it's one day a week then I think you know one day in the office a month seems to kind of a reasonable balance.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
One question, and what did you as a host understand by impartiality during the fellowship?

Host 2  
Yeah, I had some sort of concerns about how the fellowship scheme would work at the outset. There were probably for a few things I thought could be issues with kind of differences between perhaps the way that academics were used to working and the way that we were used to working in the library, and I think one of those issues was probably around impartiality and just whether an academic was specialising in a particular area where would find working doing work that was kind of going be used by MP and that, you know, would they kind of understand the kind of some of the kind of political dynamics within Parliament that might mean they would have to think about how they you know.

So I'm not putting this very well. I say the issue is the way that the academic writes about the subject might be different from the way the library might write about it, in that that generally we wouldn't in the library wouldn't be giving our own views on how we thought particular policy area was working. We'd often be kind of citing other people's views or, you know, giving us summary of a debate on a particular area and.

But my concerns around impartiality absolutely weren't borne out by our experience and our fellow was really already used to kind of working in or writing in that style, and I think probably also kind of adapted her style quite well to the way we worked in the library.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
That's good. Just to clarify then, not specifically about this particular fellow, but do you think that impartiality can be understood differently between an academic in their role as an academic and the Parliamentary work of the fellow?

Host 2  
Yeah. I've thought it a little bit about this and in in the past and sort of interactions, you know, talking to academics in different areas and I think they were there are different kinds of academics as well on there. And I think it's just not one homogenous group, are they? And I think you'll get people working that have perhaps quite well known views on issues and in some areas there'll be kind of active participants in debates policy.

You know that’s not something that would stop you working in Parliament but I think for the library is a probably a slightly different to committee office I think in the sense that we can't be seen on taking a particular line or on an issue and there are perhaps academics less kind of, you know, engaged in those debates. Might be a better fit for the library.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Do you have any suggestions how future fellows might manage the boundary on impartiality? And did you offer any guidelines on, say, use of Twitter?

Host 2  
I don't think we offered any specific guidance beyond that which was sort of included in the general kind of paperwork from POST and the knowledge Exchange Unit, which I remember there was, there were some guidance in there about impartiality.

You know, we didn't have any issues because our academic fellow kind of understood those parameters very well. But yeah, I think absolutely they probably would be benefitting in having some more thought about what those we kind of explained that though, you know issues around impartiality and the use of social media and Twitter. I mean I don't. Yeah, I don't.

I don't think it was an issue in this particular case, but I think yes that you could imagine it could become an issue certainly.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And just one quick follow up on that would do anything that you suggest that might be included in particular?

Host 2  
I mean, I think probably just having some kind of guidance for academic fellows as a kind of basis for a discussion. I think that would be would be useful.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
When your fellow was here and did, were you, whether or did you facilitate a contacts with other PAFs or anything like that?

Host 2  
Did we do that? No, I don't think we did. And it's not terribly easy finding out where other PAFs are though. Didn't seem like there was obvious way of kind of linking those up.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
What about other members of the team? Did you set up meetings with them?

Host 2  
Oh, absolutely yes. I think one benefits probably for all you know of having a PAF in immediate team was we have quite good contacts the XXX Committee and then with relevant colleagues who cover similar issues in the library and so I think the fellow did meet other parts of the team quite quickly, at least the ones covering for XXX policy. She came along to team meetings you know, and so she got to meet, you know, my immediate team as well.

I didn't have a very good sense of where other PAFs were and I was sort of quite often going around telling people that XXX was the first PAF that we'd had in the library and then subsequently found out that actually there had been quite a few others in different parts of the library.

But I think for the organisation of the awareness of where other PAFs are working doesn’t that exist there at the moment. And then that could be improved. Definitely.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Okay that's useful to know. Um, just looking at the post fellowship period. And have there been any benefits to you as an individual from hosting the fellowship?

Host 2  
Yeah, definitely. I mean the probably the main one was just sort of new understanding you know the benefits of kind of getting insights and support from an academic fellow.

I hadn't quite sort of seen how useful that would be before. But I think because generally in the day to day, you kind of type of research that we do within the library academic research is often not hugely big part of that and it varies obviously between different policy portfolios and some people will be using academic research a lot more but in the area of XXX policy which I cover which is often about kind you're using government reports … guidance documents and then and a lot of academic work often sits behind that. But it's not the kind of you know, it's not that kind of primary academic work.

Um, and I thought, you know, the time scales of the academics were actually were just so different to the kind of time scales we worked. You know, you might be turning over in the library, might be having to turn around a response to an MP, you know, with a bit of research, you know, within day or something I could of the well, academics are probably there were used to working on time scales and sort of months and years on projects.

Um, but no, I think I think that was completely kind of, those sort of concerns were going to prove to be of unfounded really in in that there were lots of areas where our work benefited from XXX’s insights, I mean I think that was and that that again is partly because I think the area she was covering.

You know, it's quite important the legal framework around XXX policy, which means that having someone with the sort of expertise is very useful and understanding kind of some of the complexities around that …

But I think in general it can, yes, it was, it was definitely kind of very positive experience So yes it was that and then what else did I get out of it?

Um, I mean, I think you know, useful kind of contacts. We've sort of have an ongoing relationship with XX so that you know, if we need a specialist working in a particular area we've got someone we would feel confident approaching and that's not just for me and my team, but I think also for you know the committee and others as well it's useful contact to have.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Would any other benefits to the either the team or the organisation?

Host 2  
Well, I mean, the other thing I just going to comment on and say was of course, I mean the obvious kind of benefits to just in terms of the outputs that she produced while she was working with us. So I mean there, you know a number of briefings that she wrote, some contributed to and a number of those were in areas that I think we probably wouldn't have covered otherwise or at least not to the same level of detail. So there were briefings on kind of draft legislation … which mean it would have been done anyway, but I think was definitely improved by having XXX's contribution. But then there was some other things again, you know, things we hadn't particularly planned at the outset of the fellowship that she did short articles on XXX.

And she worked very closely with the XXX Committee on one of their inquiries. And she did some really useful work and in helping to set up or supporting the team that was testing out the Bill Committee and she evidence to that committee. Again, she might have might well have done that already as a kind of leading academics in their field but I think that that I think we helped sort of facilitate her work with the committees and also the committee's benefits from that.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And would you change anything about how you hosted your fellowship?

Host 2  
I mean, I was. It was a really positive experience and I think you know I think we I think you know I got a lot out of it.

I mean, it's so hard to disentangle some of that early days of the fellowship from the sort of lockdown experience and that wasn't clearly that wasn't ideal and   
I think we made-up for that later on

I think, yeah, well, the other thing I would say it was just getting over that kind of uncertainty about what our expectations were. We needed to be quite kind of specific about the kind of things the outcomes we were going to plan for which I think it's useful.

I think some of the really useful stuff that came out of the fellowship wasn't in the initial plan, it was kind of the things that could have developed as time went on. I think again, this is probably particular to working in Parliament and in the library is that we are quite reactive as politics have changes. And then, you might be doing one thing and then, you know suddenly government changes or, you know, a policy area working on gets delayed by a year and maybe just sort of thinking from the outset that that, you know that flexibility was going to be really important.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Just to offer one last opportunity. Do you have any suggestions for how the fellowship scheme might be improved?

Host 2  
I mean, not, not particularly. I think it's worked really well in our case.

I think maybe the people who haven't been involved with it, with the fellowship scheme before having a bit more expectation for a bit more explanation about how the system works I felt we probably went into it slightly kind of not really knowing what we were going to get out of events and I maybe there's no way round that, but I suspect as probably more fellowships that have had now happened within Parliament, you know, just yeah, having kind of examples and probably some of the work you're doing imagine might help feed into this is having some kind of write ups of kind of how fellowships have worked in individual cases that people can kind of look at and sort of get a sense of what to expect.

The only other I mean this is a bit of a side point. XXX invited me to go to her university to give a talk with her to, to her kind of faculty about the fellowship scheme and we both got out of it and insights into kind of working with Parliament and all that kind of thing and that was really useful, and it was a nice way of kind of finishing off the this is about sort of three or four months after the after the, after the fellowship had finished.

We're getting better at inviting academics to come into Parliament, but actually I think what we're still not doing is sending out a systematic way is sort of reverse, you know there's it's getting people who work in Parliament to go and spend time, you know, in the university and yeah, that that would probably also be useful experience.