**Transcript Host 3**

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my project that I'm doing from the Knowledge Exchange Unit on reviewing the Parliamentary Academic Fellowship scheme.

The final transcripts will be deposited at the Open University I'll be removing all identifying marks, so no names and no offices either.

Host 3  
Okay sounds good. Yeah, no problem.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Um, I'll probably send you a copy in advance from the team's thing once I've anonymised it and if there's anything else you want stuck out of it, just let me know.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
It's just to get a sense of how you found the Parliament Academic Fellowship scheme.

I’ve interviewed almost all parliamentary academic fellows now I've just got one more to do and I've started on doing the hosts now.

I'm going to split into three different bits really. The kind of pre fellowship period.

Um, just a couple of questions about the fellowships themselves and then the post POST period, if you like. And so just to start off with them, how did you find the process of advertising short listing of fellows?

Host 3  
Do you mean the way that the KEU told other parts of Parliament who was available?

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Um, yeah, well, anything when you put it in for fellow, did you find the process quite easy and was it quite involved?

Host 3  
So I've had two parliamentary academic fellows, and both of them have come from suggestions made by the fellows themselves of work that they would like to do in Parliament.

I've never advertised something that I want doing and then try to find someone outside to fit it. It's always been the people have come. They've proposed themselves to the scheme and they've proposed a project and I've been interested in them. And then so I've only done it from that. That way round.

I think the reason why I haven't got my own projects and tried to find somebody's to fit them as I just haven't had time to be able to do that. Whereas when you've got people coming in to you, they're kind of doing that side of the work for you.

So I think it was it was fairly straight forward to see who had made an application and who was proposing which themes and which parts of the organisation they might fit best with. So the information provided to us about the applicants was fairly straight forward to navigate.

And it was obvious which sections of POST or other teams that they would naturally have a better fit with. So that was that was fairly straight forward.

I think just a general comment would be I found the administrative paperwork that was required of hosts to complete was quite cumbersome.

There was an incredible depth of information that was provided at each stage and it was sometimes quite hard to navigate your way through it to find the bit that you needed for the point you were at in the recruitment process. So I think that is something that was probably the most difficult part of it, it was quite time consuming.

And you had to keep checking in and first of all, it's like work out which document you needed to look in for the information that you needed to make a decision at each point of the recruitment stage. And yeah, there it just felt like it was an awful lot of paperwork, actually.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
When the fellow arrived, let's say fellows. Right. Did you have an induction plan for the fellows?

Host 3  
Um, yes, I would say it was probably less well structured than the induction plans that we have for fellows that come in through PhD schemes, because that's a really long established scheme and has a very set induction process because they're here for three months doing a very structured project.

So the induction, I think the inductions that I plan for the two people I was working with was an induction created bespoke for each of them according to what they needed to be doing for their projects because their projects were quite different.

Well, one of them worked completely remotely with me, so he was not able to come onto the estate at all, and we never even met each other actually in person. And that was during the pandemic. So his induction was done remotely. But I still tried to give him the opportunity to meet other members of staff.

So that he could understand a bit more about the context that he was working in and for the other parliamentary academic fellow who did an in person fellowship with me she came. She was working. She was working in another part of the UK and was not able to come in every week. But we agreed that she would come in periodically and she spent a little bit of time at the beginning to kind of orient herself and to meet people.

And so I think, yeah, there was an induction, but it was, it was bespoke to each person according to their circumstances and it was created by me rather than by … It wasn't facilitated by anybody else in the organisation or supported in that way.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv

How useful is that induction plan for settling the PAF?

Host 3  
I think it was really important for them because otherwise they wouldn't really understand.

Um, first of all, the context in which we will operating in Parliament and how what they might be doing would have relevance to other parts of the organisation.

Host 3

So yeah, I think it's really, I think it's really important for anybody because you otherwise you just don't know what you're supposed to be doing. So with each of them I set out like a project plan with dates to be delivering particular things.

Um, and I think that helped them to understand how much time they've actually got to do different parts of the projects. I think my experience of PAFs, I've only had two, but my experience is that they tend to overestimate what they can achieve in the time available to them.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Do you have any general suggestions for what should be an induction plans for PAFs based on your experience?

Host 3  
I think that they definitely need to spend time in the organisation physically at the beginning of their project for at least a few days so that they could meet people and get set up on all the IT systems and just yeah, just to just to create some relationships.

It creates a relationship, obviously with the person that's supervising the project.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
So face to face is important?

Host 3  
Yeah, I think so. I think it's fine to work remotely once that's established, but I think it just improves things if you can actually spend some time face to face in that way at the beginning.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Anything else?

Host 3  
Well, I think that the PAFs that we host in POST at the time when I was looking after them benefited from induction activities that we were providing for PhD fellows.

So we said to them if there are any of these training activities that you're interested in, then you can join them so I don't know to what extent a more structured induction programme is required for them as a group or I don't currently know what's offered for them.

So I'm speaking from a kind of point of ignorance about what they currently get access to, but I think because they do such different projects their induction needs, there might be some things that they could all do that would be helpful, but there are probably very specific things according to which team they're working and what kind of project they're doing.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did you know with your PAFs, did you know if they connected up with other PAFs at all?

Host 3  
One of them did. Yes, one of them did. I'm struggling to remember the first one because it was quite a while ago and because the second one, this was somebody who worked completely remotely, they were using Microsoft Teams to engage with that cohort of people. I mean, obviously it was just made more difficult by the fact that, you know, they were working during the pandemic and they weren't able to come in at all.

But as far as I know, there was there was some limited contact with other people doing similar projects. Yeah, which I think is really helpful for them because it's nice to know what the experiences of other people doing a similar thing to you are. So you can share information.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
But the flipside is, when you were Parliamentary host, were you aware where other PAFs were situated?

Host 3

For my second PAF I was. And for my first PAF, I'd say I probably wasn't, that was probably 2018. Yeah, it was before 2020.

And so that one probably not because I think the scheme was much less well established then.

I think less time had been spent on coordinating information across that cohort with the hosts, but for the second PAF I knew where people were, what they were doing, so I have that information available.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Was impartiality understood differently between the academic and the parliamentary work of the fellow? I mean, was that an issue?

Host 3  
For the first PAF, it was an issue. The first PAF was an academic working not directly in the area that they were working on a briefing on, but they were working on in a disciplinary area and the PAF had very strongly held views about the conduct of particular groups of stakeholders and particular policies that that the government had put in place to address.

And I think that that meant that they were less inclined to consider the perspectives of those groups that with whom they had a fundamental disagreement with, as to their stance about this particular issue.

As a supervisor, it was easy to challenge that and say, well, actually this is a group of stakeholders who have an opinion that we need to hear, and we need to understand what that perspectives are. And they had no problem in engaging with them … I suppose as a note of caution, it's important as a supervisor to be able to recognise that quite early so that you can be very clear about what the ground rules are about.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did you discuss social media?

Host 3  
With both PAFs, I think we did. I think I explained that we had a policy about that and that and we expected them to conduct themselves while they were doing their fellowship in line with that policy.

And I think for the I think for one of the PAFs that was probably more challenging than for the other because of the perspectives they had about this particular policy area that were not aligned with their views as an academic I would say, but we never had any problems with social media or never had cause to address any online behaviour with either of them.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Would you have any suggestions for how those boundaries might be managed in future?

Host 3  
That's a bit of a tricky one, isn't it? Because I suppose it's just about them understanding what the policy is and if they are to take this position on, then that's part of the contract that they have to respect while they're taking the fellowship forward and I think there are ways of sharing information about your fellowship without necessarily sharing a view about what you think about something.

It probably requires some training as part of their induction. If they're active on social media. And understanding where the boundaries are and you know and you can make a decision, a fellow can make a decision to not tweet about their fellowship, if that's probably easier for them to. But if they can't separate it out, it's probably easier if they just refrain from that altogether.

But we have lots of examples of where fellows can promote their fellowship and the work that they're doing with us successfully without there being a conflict of interest as well. So there's there is a way to do it and we can demonstrate examples of how people can do that successfully without causing a problem as well, so…

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Have you any other suggestions for the best way to support Fellows one so actually embedded once I've actually running the project.

Host 3  
Well my approach is to have this induction programme and to set out the project milestones and the dates and the expectations of what they're going to deliver and when with the PAF programme you can kind of give them an indication of that before they even start, really to see whether something is realistic or not. But my approach to supervision is to first of all understand what kind of supervision works for them.

So what their preferences are around, how much autonomy they kind of need or want and how much contact they want with me as we move through the project. So I think at the beginning of a project I'll probably have contact perhaps everyday for the first two weeks and then it drops off to perhaps twice a week, and then once a week and then increases again as we get towards the end of the project and you're going through kind of editorial processes or other kinds for the output they're producing.

But I suppose I don't really understand whether PAFs have a consistent supervisory experience or not. And I suppose that varies quite a bit depending on staff attitudes to supervision and how much time they have available to them for giving people what they need on these projects.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Were you given any guidance on supervision? Was there training on supervision, anything like that?

Host 3  
I don't remember. And probably if there was, I might well have just thought, ‘Well, I've got a significant amount of supervisory experience from having been in POST for a long time and having had lots of PhD students coming through’. So if it had been offered to me, I probably wouldn't have felt like I needed it.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Have there been any benefits for using individual from hosting a PAF?

Host 3  
Yeah, but have I mean it's a really, it's a really interesting opportunity to work with academics who are at a different stage of their career compared to the fellows that we get on the track that we have for the PhD programmes in the post. So that's nice because you're working with academics who have a bit more established in their careers, but that's my experience of the two people that I've worked with and also you are benefiting from a particular set of expertise on an area that's obviously of direct interest to me and the team will generally for the kind of outputs that we want to produce.

I would say the second PAF I had, which was a project that they had proposed themselves, but which we shaped together because it I felt that what they were seeking to achieve in the time was a bit unrealistic. We really spent a lot of time thinking about what we could actually produce in the time and what would be useful. And it was a piece of work that was of scientific interest from the point of view of what the PAF was examining, but it's also allowed us to reflect on our editorial processes in the office and how we might change them so that our publications are better. So I feel like that one has had a lot of impact both in knowledge and in practice.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Were there any wider benefits to either the team or the organisation itself.

Host 3  
With the with the second PAF, who worked on this project, that was around how we work editorially and how we might seek to change that. We tried to make the information that that person had created more widely available across the organisation, so we agreed that we would organise a seminar so that he could share his knowledge about this particular area more widely with the with the wider group of researchers across the committee office and the libraries.

And we also made the report that he wrote about what he'd found more widely available so that other teams could reflect on it. What they've done with that information, that I don't know. But after we published a resume of the piece of work on POST website, we've had a number of contacts externally asking us about that piece of research and to give us give them more information because they were also interested in understanding how they might reflect on that approach to the work that they do. So it's generated both. It's generated more interest outside than inside, but I don't necessarily think that people internally will share with you what the impact has been.

Host 3  
But the first PAF, if I could just explain the context if that so the PAF on the first scheme was doing a briefing note for POST and that project did not finish as person did not deliver the output that was agreed at the beginning for various reasons and so we had to terminate that fellowship agreement because it was it was taking too long and I think the person who was doing the fellowship had underestimated how much time they would need to actually achieve the project and had also started a new role at the same time as they started the fellowship, and I think that the competing demands were too great.

And so the fellowship was the thing that that got less time and that didn't change. So we had to terminate the fellowship and we didn't get a publication out of that particular fellowship.

We thought maybe it probably take like a year to get to the output based on the number of hours that they thought that they could commit to it, but we extended that a couple of times and then after two years there was still no output. So we just said right, we have to draw a line under this now and we terminated it.

So the PAF just was unable to give the project the time that it required, and I think that working at the pace on it that they were working didn't lend itself to, what's the expression, there wasn't enough momentum to keep it going at the pace that they were working at. And so every time they came back to it, they probably had to spend a lot of time thinking about where they were when they left it, you know, like maybe a couple of weeks before.

And it just, yeah, it just it just didn't move forward quickly enough and we had to think about how I was spending my time on something that wasn't producing something or whether my time would be better spent on other things which is a decision we came to. So I think it was the, I don't know if it's the only example, but I think it's an example of where we terminate an agreement.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
How was the process for doing that?

Host 3  
And there wasn't one at that time. So the KEU had to find out what the process would be from a contractual point of view, and then and then get some advice and then we did it. We followed the steps that were given to us, basing advice to terminate the agreement.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And was that with mutual agreement?

Host 3  
Yes.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Last couple of questions, would you change anything about the way you host your fellowships?

Host 3  
I would probably what with my second PAF. I spent much more time thinking about how much time they had available on what was realistic on based on the proposal they submitted, and I think that was time very well spent because my experience with the first PAF was that that wasn't something that we perhaps spent enough time talking about, and so with the second one I think I think project planning around time and being realistic about what can be achieved is actually really important.

And also that we built in time to kind of have proper kind of academic discussions about what they were doing. It wasn't just like, tell me what you're doing.

So I know what you're doing and then you just get on with it. It was actually, well, have you thought about doing this or have you thought about comparing this with this? So it was, it was very interesting kind of exchange of challenge on both sides about the project, which I think made it made it better and made it more relevant to what would be useful for us afterwards. I also think there's a general, there's a general thing here about, I don't think there's adequate attention given to the time that you need to spend on disseminating what's produced at the end.

So with the second PAF, we spent quite a lot of time thinking about what would be produced and how we might, how we might, how we might share it in a number of ways for different audiences, and that was really, really good. So he produced the final report.

He did a seminar after, disseminated his knowledge with a wider group across parliament. We got an article commissioned for a parliamentary magazine that has a very specific scientific interest audience. And then we published a piece on our web page as well. So we were disseminating the outputs in a in a number of ways which maximised the impact, but also engaged external stakeholders with us, which is always really useful for us as well.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Have you at any follow up work? Since your PAFs have left?

Host 3  
With either of them, no. I think with the first one, because of how it ended up, there wouldn't be.

But with the second one, I think that as we sort of, um, adopted some of the ideas and suggestions that were proposed and the analysis that they've done, then I would certainly want to let them know how things have changed as a consequence of the work that they did.

And obviously, having that expert contact in that particular field is really helpful. So if we're ever doing anything on that area again I would go to him and say ‘We're doing something on this. Can you kind of help us? Like, work out who the experts are? Or do you know any good papers or things like that?’ So it's having that personal relationship as well.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Is there any anything you want to add for how the fellowship scheme might be improved?

Host 3  
I think the main thing for me would be to make the administration of it less paperwork heavy, I mean, I know there has to be some paperwork, but it just felt so administratively burdensome, especially for the recruitment stages.

If there was some way of simplifying the paperwork or that would be helpful.

And maybe understanding a bit more clearly what kind of structured programme of training is on offer for them so that you could see what gaps might need to be filled according to what they have to do when they're working with you.

And maybe a bit more kind of expectation management for the PAF about how much time in these kinds of things take so that they can be a bit more. So that they can have a more realistic idea about what they can commit themselves to, and not overcommit themselves, and then not be able to deliver things.