**Transcript PAF 4**

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
I'm at the Open University and I am doing a Parliamentary Academic Fellowship at the Knowledge Exchange Unit. And what I'm doing is part of this is interviewing former PAFs and parliamentary hosts.

And the idea is to find out a little bit of detail about the one experience of having done a PAF. You know what went wrong, what could have been improved and what was good about it and so on. And I'm also interviewing parliamentary hosts.

Um, so it's June. July is when I'm doing the bulk of the interviews. There might be few in August, but basically June, July. And the transcripts will be I all identifying remarks will be removed and so it won't refer to names or locations.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Yeah, okay cool. Brilliant. Like so. Basically it's going to split into basically 3 sections and then a little add on at the end. It's the kind of pre application period or the pre fellowship period, the actual fellowship itself and then I'll be asking a couple of questions about what happened after then just a few final concluding thoughts about how you think might be improved at it and so on.

So thinking back now to the actual process of you applying for Parliamentary academic Fellowship. How do you find the process of actually applying?

PAF 4  
So there's quite a long time ago now cause all this happened. I did mine over COVID, so I think it was like 2019.

And it came around the application. You know the call came around via the university. So I heard about it sort of internally on, you know, something that comes around funding things and then you there was something specifically related to XXX, which was what piqued my attention because I don't do lot of parliamentary work, but … I've done lots of work on XXX. So I was like, oh, what's this really interesting. And because I don't do a lot of parliamentary work, I was like oh wow, I could really learn loads of stuff.

The form was pretty straight forward if I remember rightly it they were when you looked at the call and specifically what they wanted. It was quite prescriptive. So they it wasn't particularly like were you designed the methodology and you designed the approach, it was like we want somebody to do this and then it was more about sort of making suggestions or filling in gaps about how they could do things. So um, the form wasn't particularly onerous.

You know, I applied for quite a lot of grants and this was like oh this is quite straight forward. It was, you know, what do you think I mean at the top of my head, you know, the background, what's your background? What have you done similar type of work. Have you got any connection to XXX. So it was fairly straight forward.

And then I had an interview which was on the phone and where the questions again were you know not taxing at all. I remember thinking. Oh that was pretty straight forward and.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Were you being interviewed by your host office?

PAF 4  
So while one of the people that did interview then subsequently was the person who then sort of was my key point of contact, one of my key points of contact for the duration of the project, but the other person wasn't and so some of the questions I was like.

I just remember thinking, I wish I can remember specific examples, but I wish I remember thinking oh it's a very slightly off the wall question and it may be because they were coming it from a different perspective because this wasn't really their thing,

I don't know but normally in interviews you feel or I certainly feel, ‘Oh my word. I hope I didn't embarrass myself and that was really interesting question’ and I came out of the interview thinking why maybe I know more than I think I do about XXX

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
So I'm once you actually started, and I mean this is kind of a leading question earlier. Um, how useful was the induction plan and that and that and that presumes there was an induction plan?

PAF 4  
So I was stuck in the COVID thing, so at this was supposed to start in April 2020.

I think what we plan of what to do. So there were lots of things that were put in place. It was, you got your own e-mail address, a parliamentary e-mail address, then you were fed into a nice, a really nice, very friendly group that were the team and the wider team. I think that were working on these issues. Mine was slightly unusual in the sense that most people who I understand having spoken to other people who've done this are really properly in Westminster.

You know, I was put immediately on the e-mail thing. I think we had to do some online training. There was another, a little another group set up for post fellowships that you were sort of part of. So you knew what people would doing. There were some meetings for them. And then there was a process like a security process of in theory, going and picking up your parliamentary pass. But that never happened because we were in lock down. That's it.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Right.

PAF 4  
So this was supposed to officially start in April and we were then in like, OK, let's just wait and see cause it involved me going. I haven't said anything about the project … And forgive me if this is your area and I'm just, you know, turning teaching you to suck eggs.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
No, no, it's not. I'm social policy. So this is new to me.

PAF 4  
So, the original plan was that I would watch what was going on, interview the clerk and various members of Parliament and other people and see are they working? How was the process? … Speak to members of Parliament. Speak to the clerk. Interview lots of people who …XXX [Details of project removed]

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Yeah.

PAF 4  
So part of it was to see, you know, did the host’s role in delivering the project, you know, was that respectful, you know, did it work? Is that something they could replicate in other places?

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Yeah.

PAF 4  
You know, was it inclusive? Was it collaborative? You know, did they the [local partners] feel like they owned it as opposed to somebody flying in and going, what you need to do this? And then secondly, did the project actually deliver, were any amendments now needed? So it involved a series of interviews going to the assembly, watching things that were going on, speaking to people who've been involved in the processes and speaking to Members of Parliament .

PAF 4  
Doing an online interview with someone assessing whether these things are effective when I've never met them and I've never even been to the building, it just felt like I can't do this. So then we tried to find, we waited, thought. Well, let's just wait.

And then the longer [covid] went on, it was like oh, this is not going to work. So then we tried online meetings to try and gather information rather than being interviews. So we tried to do a few of those sorts of things as a way of trying to get people's views, but without it being an evaluation. But that was more on the sort of evaluating the project side as opposed to evaluating XXX.

So we were delayed, got extended …I mean, we were all like, what do we do? And I said, look, I just, I don't you know I will go out as soon as I can, but I just don't feel comfortable doing the evaluation of XXX until I'm physically there …

But then eventually. When was it? … And, you know, when people were sitting and the right people being there … And I spoke to on this super organised trip because the deputy clerk was the key person involved in all of this in the project from the start and he's just amazing

Incredibly, you just think, wow, you know, knows everything, knows everybody, super efficient, had a whole programme lined up for me. So I met loads of people at various meetings, larger meetings and then smaller meetings and then interviewing individual people … And so the project eventually got done. It just took a long time.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
No, no, no, no. It's very good context.

This question is going to seem like a handbrake turn now, but it's not.

PAF 4  
That's fine.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv

Do you have any suggestions for what things could be? Should be an induction for paths for incoming PAFs based on your experience?

PAF 4  
No, I mean, I would have loved to have gone to Westminster. so one of the reasons I did it was because I wanted to know more about parliamentary procedures … I do lots of government policy things, but don't really do a lot of like legislative processes. And so one of the things that I really wanted to do was actually sit in, you know, committees in Westminster and so on. I was like oh, this will be so interesting.

No, because it just by the time I could even go to London it didn't quite fit with a lot of the people I was working with …

Yeah, that but that was no fault of theirs. It was just process and that would have happened. I'm sure that was the plan.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And you think that would that something like that would be important for PAFs?.

PAF 4  
We had a couple of online meetings where there was sort of basic introductions to various parliamentary procedures. I did go and they were really helpful. But there's nothing like seeing it in person.

I can't fault them cause they were really trying to integrate you a. They had loads of webinars and various different things. They, you know really tried to make you feel involved

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Just to clarify, when we say ‘they’ are we talking about.

PAF 4  
My host team. Yeah. Sorry, I'll clarify.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
That's fine, I wasn't sure whether the knowledge exchange unit was involved in any of that.

PAF 4  
They might have been, but my key point of contact with two people in host team, and then I was on an e-mail grouping for those that team.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And did you ever did you have a regular parliament to supervisor.

PAF 4  
Only these two individuals that I was directly connected with and it might, I don't know. They were people in XXX who were heading up this project, but I was then, you know, doing this work for and I it may have been, it's slightly different setup because it was like this separate [office]

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
I mean some of the stuff you've covered already. So I'm going just think of a couple of things about your actual work while a fellow, and so one topic is about impartiality.

Was impartiality, understood differently between your academic work and your parliamentary work?

PAF 4  
I don't know. I guess when I drafted the application, you know some of that would have been about, you know, how are you going to go about doing this work?

And then you know, some of this was obviously about gathering information and interviews and, you know, the questions you ask in interviews and so on and so.

I do a lot of interviews as part of my research anyway, and so that you know, and that also has to go through our ethical clearance here within the university. And so then I would share the questions with the people I was working with to make sure that you know we weren't coming in it from particular perspective, so.

I guess I'd be quite conscious of trying to be as impartial as I can be, but then nobody's completely impartial. I think the sharing of ideas with other people hopefully addresses what we can. I don't remember talking about being independent explicitly but it was definitely sort of implied, I guess in the questions that were being asked and how they were being asked.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Were there any tensions, for example, I don't know if you have a university Twitter account, your own personal social media accounts.

PAF 4  
I don't do social media.

A lot of my other work is quite politically sensitive and … so I'm really careful … I just I just think no, I'm just not even going there . So I've never been very comfortable with social media. So I just don't use publicity or anything. So that wasn't ever an issue It just never arose in that sense.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Well, just this might seem an odd question to ask you then. And because I guess one way of managing a potential tension between your work as an academic and your work as a PAF for example, well one response is well, I'm not going to do social media right. But if you were to do social well, this is a bit hypothetical. Now would you have any suggestions about?

PAF 4  
So within that, you know all of the usual stuff on anonymity of interviews. And so I had to be incredibly careful. They may have. I don't know what they did, whether they then were tweeting about it, I've got no idea, I didn't because I don't.

I don't remember any conversations about that. Another output I did for them was a sort of like a step by step process for a really good project like this because there were some really, really good things that they did and they wanted to use that as sort of lessons learnt for other projects. So I wrote out a little sort of step by step guide of top tips or thing that you could you know, do in other projects and they I think they published that somewhere .

But beyond that? So I don't know,   
Is if you're just disseminating information, you're telling people there's a report out there, then that sort of relatively easy.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Was ever discussed with you?

PAF 4  
Not that I remember … So it doesn't answer your question particularly, but.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Based on your experience, if I've understood you correctly, you didn't manage to get to go to Westminster.

PAF 4  
Did a couple of times . Basically, they had some of the [officials] and I went down twice. I think when they were there as part of the sort of package of meetings that they had.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Based on your experience, what would you regard as the kind of the best way to support a PAF while they're doing the project, I mean thinking about the blend of face to face or catch ups or whatever. Do you have any suggestions?

PAF 4  
I think so. Regular meetings just to touch base. I mean for me that just called keeps me on my toes. I'm like, right, I need to have certain things, certain tasks in place. I need to do. So regular meetings doesn't necessarily need to be you know in person online or a combination, you know? I think the plan was initially that you would go there sort of once a week or once every couple of weeks and have a, you know, a day there. But obviously that never happened because we hit COVID right at the very start.

And so, yeah, regular meetings with key people being part of a bigger team. So you could pick up on things that were happening. So having that e-mail address and being included in those you know, sort of daily emails that people get if you're in an organisation was quite nice and then, you know, if I had the time again and it wasn't COVID then yeah, going to Westminster and seeing what was happening and…

I know some people go every week. I think that was what, how their fellowships worked and maybe not necessarily every week, but at least sort of regularly enough that you've got that contact and you can get a proper sense of how things work, I think.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Thinking about some of the kind of post Post period. Do you know of any outcomes or impacts from the sort of work you did?

PAF 4  
So mine finished because it was extended so many times so we could actually get the work done. I can't remember when it actually finished. It may have been officially like March last year, but it might even be later than that. I can't remember.

So since then I haven't had a lot of contact with them I haven't heard whether you know they've used it or what they've taken further, I was invited to a meeting in January, which I couldn't make unfortunately

They called XXX meeting, which I think where I fed back findings on the project as a whole, which I think came if not after the end of the project, certainly towards the end of it. But beyond that, now that, I mean, I'm really have had hardly any contact with them since and it would be quite nice, you know, the sort of one thing they were really keen on me doing was sort of having that top tips for you know, new projects and stuff and it I did try.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did you have a debrief meeting at the end?

PAF 4  
Yeah. Had a debrief meeting and then I had a similar impact when I got your e-mail, I was thinking I've already done this because I initially read it as somebody from within the team contact me and then give me a little sort of interview of how did it go? What would be helpful. You know, that sort of thing, yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
OK, did you produce or coauthor any kind of outputs?

PAF 4  
Yeah. So those two, two things. So the report on, you know, all the sort of findings but I don't know whether they published it. And then the other thing was this, you know, list of tips of how to, you know.

And then somebody was going to do nice graphics on it and then it was going to go on their website. And I kept saying was it up there? And they said, oh, well, there's something about the graphics and then I don't know what happened. And then because I'm just so busy, I was like, oh, you know, that's off my radar. I don't need to do that now. So I don't know, to be honest, I don't know what happened to either of those.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Okay that's interesting to know. OK, thank you. I'm just thinking about the impacts of the fellowship on your career, like or your academic work.

PAF 4

Oh your academic work, yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
How?

PAF 4  
So I haven't. I haven't published anything from it. That was initially discussed, but then it didn't quite fit, you know, at the end of it. So I didn't publish. I didn't write an academic paper. I sort of do things have I need to most of my outputs are quite policy orientated so that doesn't necessarily bother me.

From a personal perspective it was just like, really good. I feel a lot more confident of sort of parliamentary procedures, which is what I wanted and it, you know, and it definitely gave me that and it also gave me a different group of people that I've never interacted with and so it just it gives you a bit more of a rounded.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did anyone at the university follow with you after?

PAF 4  
No, but then, that's not particularly surprising, because XXX not the … I think they might have flagged it up in one of their we've got something called XXX, which is like the sort of they try and coordinate policy stuff around the university. And I think they might have had a little case study on it or something at some stage, I can't remember, but I think there was some.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
But nothing, not nothing much else.

PAF 4  
Not no, not really. I'm no there's been people who've applied for them since, and they've said, you know, would you mind being in touch with them and giving them tips and stuff? And it was something like that, but not. Not really, no.

I like to sort of explore areas and this was a really nice way of doing stuff with Parliament that I probably might not have had the confidence to do in another way. You know, I'm quite familiar with certain sectors and certain groupings and I know how to work with that, but I wouldn't have had a clue how to engage with Parliament had COVID hadn't happened, and I had to do it in a very different way. And so that was really nice. It just gives you another strand, you know.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Just final question now. If you were thinking just based on your on experience of ways in which the fellowship scheme might be improved, do you have any suggestions?

PAF 4  
No. Maybe the main thing is post. You know what? What happens afterwards? Because I think there's so you lose the e-mail address, which is fine, but then you're then out of that sort of loop and I don't I'm because mine was really quite a discrete thing that they wanted done.

Then it's like you're. You're a bit like. OK, right. That's it then. And it would have been quite nice to continue some of those things on maybe it just didn't happen naturally and maybe I didn't push it enough. Sometimes these things are. I mean, I was think they're quite organic. Sometimes they happen, sometimes they don't. And depending on how much time everybody's got or whether it fits with what they're doing.

But I mean really not a great deal. I mean, I'm sort of, you know, just trying to clutching at straws a bit really trying to find something to say.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
OK. No, no, no, that's fine.

PAF 4  
It was just a really nice. It was a really nice sort of discrete project to do. The people are working with really nice.