**Transcript PAF 8**

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

In fact, I think you're the final PAF I'm interviewing. I'm going to hosts as well.

All the transcripts will be anonymized. All identifying marks will be removed, so they'll be no references to specific sections people worked in so on and I'll probably send you the transcript from MS Teams. Once I've anonymized it, and if there's anything else you want cutting out of it, let me know.

PAF 8  
Yeah, that sounds absolutely fine.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Looking at your experience of being a PAF And fairly straight forward and the kind of before, middle, and after. Just to start with, can you remember why you're interested in it?

PAF 8  
The opportunity came as a I think it was a wider e-mail sent round universities and one in particular to my university. I was interested because it was very much in my field. Um, but a bit more broader than, let's say, my specific research.

It was a parliamentary academic fellowship, working on XXX and providing briefings on XXX, and that was a particular interest to me. And so because it had this opportunity, and it sounded a bit different. It was something that I fancied applying for what I liked about the call or the, you know, to the call to apply was it wasn't for a specific project, it was for being embedded within a team in the House of Commons library for a year, initially, and that sounded really interesting and the project itself, or at least the way it was framed, was about providing a more kind of long term strategy for the team. And providing some kind of baseline research briefings for it. And so that sounded really great and something that really interested me.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And can you remember what the process of a plan was up was like?

PAF 8  
Um like how I found it.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Yeah. I mean, was it?

PAF 8  
From what I recall, it was a really straight forward process of an application form.

I think there's a draft plan or something like that about how you would contribute to the team and how you'd implement your proposed project as it were.

And then the interview process again, nothing unusual than what you'd find in, say, in a job interview. At that, that was very straight forward as well, but I think what I liked about it was also quite welcoming. It was formal but there was enough of a let's say like a welcoming approach from the team that you felt comfortable in the interview and it wasn't overly, let's say, scary or anything like that, but it was a yeah, it was a very straight forward interview process.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
When you started was that under Covid or not?

PAF 8  
Yes, it was so I started in September 2020, when it was.

We just come out of summer, hadn't we were. So it was during Covid. It was during hybrid working. There was an original plan to be working in Parliament every two weeks. But that wasn't possible.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And doing your fellowship did you manage to do work on the estate?

PAF 8  
Yes, I did eventually. Eventually, once restrictions eased. I was able to go down to the estate we had research days and in person team days more regularly, I went down about once a month or once every two months. Every now and again.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And how important, I mean just thinking about kind of working patterns are   
face to face, the kind of blend of face to face and hybrid working.

PAF 8  
I think especially with the fellowship, a mix of the two is important because you do have to balance, you know, the other job.

Um and because of that, I think it was good to have the opportunity to be on the estate to actually feel like you're part of the team in Parliament.

But at the same time, being able to have that flexibility so that you could still manage your other workload and tasks at the same time. So the amount of flexibility I had was very welcome.

But there was also flexibility for me to, you know, decide when I wanted to go to Parliament, which was great, and I preferred that, but I got a lot out of it because I could take part in the in person team days or I could take part in the wider events that the research and information section of the library had going on.

Um, so I didn't feel apart from that, there was always that opportunity to go down. I mean, if I lived close to London, there was the opportunity to work in the office more regularly, but because of where I live, because I live further away from London, that flexibility was necessary for to allow me to actually be able to do the fellowship.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Okay sure. And just following up on that, just thinking in general. What would you say is the kind of best way of supporting fellows in terms of, you know, or doing the fellowship and thinking of catch ups face to face, working so on mean would you? Have you got any recommendations or anything like that?

PAF 8  
Well, because mine was. Because I wasn't part of, say, a project that I led and it wasn't specific in that, it was something that I had to have a specific timeline on mine was very much more reactive than that. I was embedded within a team and because of that I had regular team meetings every week and I had regular catch ups with my supervisor within that team and so they could be face to face or they could be in person dependent on where we were at the time. So for me there was already that regular contact and regular team updates which was much more than I had in with the team in the university setting.

So already there was so much more support there in terms of the contact time. Nah, I think that just worked great.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And did you have an induction plan when you started?

PAF 8  
Yes. So I had induction to Parliament and the relationship between Parliament, the library and POST, and how the fellowships worked, and I had an induction to the because I did enquiries for MPs because I was embedded within the team. I had training on formal aspects of that as well.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And can you remember who provided that induction training?

PAF 8  
The plan I can't remember, but there was a plan within the team, so there were a number of other specialists within the team that kind of got together to bring me on board. I don't know if there was a formal kind of on boarding for PAFs at the time because again, mine was one of the first, or at least it seemed that it was a bit more unusual where I was embedded in the team. So it was very much the team and the team leader who led that induction, if that makes sense.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did you have a supervisor?

PAF 8  
Yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Um, and how did that work?

PAF 8  
So my supervisor was a team leader for one of the sections in the library. So we would have, as I said, regular team meetings and the monthly catch ups.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Would you have any suggestions of what might be included in induction plans for paths?

PAF 8  
So I think it depends on the project. It depends on how the fellowship is going to work. Because I was more embedded in the library, I benefited more from the library inductions, whereas with the knowledge exchange team and post we had a couple of inductions to that and some welcome meetings, but they were less relevant to the work that I was doing with the library, if that makes sense. So I think it depends on where a fellow is placed. If that meant yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Were you were aware of where other PAFs were?

PAF 8  
Yes, because we had a welcome meeting where new PAFs would get together and share what they're doing and what their projects are. So I was aware of kind of my intake, but perhaps maybe not existing ones, some existing ones did turn up to some meetings, but there wasn't a list or anything like that.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And were you in contact with them even during your fellowship? Was there a kind of PAF community, as it were?

PAF 8  
Um, I wouldn't say there was a PAF community, but I did work with some who were in other teams in the library only because of the work we were doing.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Right, OK. And just thinking about impartiality. Was it understood differently between you as an academic and you as a working in Parliament?

PAF 8  
So that's an interesting one. Uh, I'll try and speak as generally as I can't. My area of research lends itself to being able to be impartial because I don't the opinions that I give are, um, I'm more expert analysis. Is it where always based on evidence and so the approach that I take in more such lended itself to being able to be impartial in the role. Now, that doesn't mean I don’t deal with some controversial… well, some yeah. To be fair, one, one of the first things I had to do was headline news. And so managing that impartiality or at least being able to manage how we presented the research was interesting because obviously, as part of the library, as a fellow, we can't take a position on something, we have to give the position of the research and then the arguments for against that are there by other experts and commentators.

But I was in a helpful position where I think my research was already not prone to taking a particular position and so I could imagine other people might find it more difficult. Perhaps maybe in other areas where they have given either opinions or they have given a point of view as experts, but helpfully I wasn't in that in that position.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did you, for example, have a university social media?

PAF 8  
I do, yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And did your behaviour change?

PAF 8  
I suppose it did, I think before. Yes, but I think I made that decision before, maybe before Parliament. But I knew that I wanted to go down more of a independent, impartial route with my research kind of gearing towards engagement with more civil service, government circles or policy circles. I think it was really important for me to have that impartiality publicly in my work. And so I avoided that on purpose. But yes, I think I definitely became more aware of how I was presenting things and how I had presented things in the past as well.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
I mean, would you give any advice to fellow, I mean, what advice would you give to fellows helping manage if they're working on a part time basis?

PAF 8  
I am an opinion, let's say a legal researcher or a political researcher might be more inclined to give expert analysis or an expert view on how something might be perceived.

I think that sometimes can be more difficult if you're prone to doing that more often.

And I think during the time at least of my fellowship or during the time of anyone's fellowship, I think it's good to be impartial at all stages.

I think my advice would be to well, we have those great training in Parliament for impartiality and I think.

Making sure that I think that training is done early on and making sure that the advice in the guidance there is followed at every point, even in the academic work is probably best, but that's my view I think, yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Sure. Um, OK, it's helpful. Did you have any advice given on social media, use of social media, Twitter and so on?

PAF 8  
Yeah, I had. I had training on impartiality, but again, I can't remember whether that was through the library or through that POST or the knowledge exchange team. I think it was through the library. Yes, it was. At least I definitely had one on impartiality through the library, so that was that was easier for me to understand how it worked within Parliament and what the limits were on engagement.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Do you know of any outcomes are impacts of the work you did?

PAF 8  
Any impacts during the fellowship? Yes, I think I can now identify a number of impacts, whether that's small or some more prominent.

They were or will be, the focus of potential case studies in future and how my research and my publications within Parliament at the time were either used in media or used in debates, and I think that was that's something that is quite tangible and easier to follow because I was fortunate enough to be able to publish within the House of Commons library.

The things that I contributed to um can be tracked if that makes sense, even if only indirectly, and even if just mentioned here and there. But that's still, I think, has an impact. And so yeah, we can, we can see how that has been used and then there are of course, the confidential briefings that I did as well for Members.

Um, so there's impacts there with how they fed back to their constituents or how they've used it in their own their own work.

PAF 8  
It was very highly encouraged. The fellowship. I was very much encouraged to apply by the university. They were very supportive of it. So much so that again, I'll try and be more general so there was a political event that occurred during my fellowship which meant that there was more demand in my team for a particular type of research, and so because of that, I was asked if I could do more time with Parliament and the university were more than happy to support that. And so I ended up increasing my participation every week with Parliament because there was a need for this kind of responsiveness to certain political events and so.

Yes the university was very supportive. I had no issues with publications or ownership of research or anything like that from my university. There were just very much happy to support they provided for me to travel to London and things like that.

Um and yeah, they were very much sure it as a good thing for the university and for and for me and for Parliament.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Has the fellowship had any impact on your academic work.

PAF 8  
In what way?

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
I mean, how's it fed into areas you've researched or has it changed anything about your research?

PAF 8  
I can feed into future research, but I think the biggest impact it's had is on how I approach research and how I approach the dissemination of research.

PAF 8  
Of course, still need to produce academic publications, articles and all of that, but I think it's also important in being able to present research in a way that is digestible to.

PAF 8  
Parliament to members, to other stakeholders and policy fields, and I think the fellowship really helped to understand what's needed in, you know, translating what is academic research to those who need to use it on a shorter timetable and maybe don't have time to read the full articles. But having that for research basis, that's the strong research basis. But then translating that I think into more digestible outputs has been something that the fellowship has definitely helped me understand.

The fellowship itself created some networks within Parliament and some contacts within parliaments, with specialists and with committee staff and with POST who would keep in contact, I think to share the latest research because it created, I think, work and relationships.

Within, you know my academic circles, which would be helpful for both me and my colleagues in the university, but also in Parliament as well. Oh, you know, going forward helping to access the latest research in academia I think.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Would you, if you were thinking about any shortcomings of the fellowship scheme.  
Um, is there anything you'd highlight?

PAF 8  
Just thinking about that.

There were none that I really picked up on. Again because it seems like a more unusual approach that I had the support that I needed in the library I had. Um.

Where there is a slight thing perhaps and this is, I think, more wider widely in in academia there was a bit of confusion I think over whether publications with Parliament had for REF and whether or not they could be used in ref or whether they couldn't. I think at the time for me it wasn't really an issue because it that wasn't a priority. So I think some clarity on how that works would be helpful. But then then again, these things change every time ref comes about anyway. So that's more of a I think maybe a wider structural issue in academia than one for the fellowship in particular.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Sure. And then just final question and the kind of flip side of that, if you were going to make any quick suggestions of any improvements you might give?

PAF 8  
Um, no, not for me. Like I said, I got a lot from the fellowship and I didn't have any issues at all. And the team that I worked with was very supportive. So there's nothing that I'm aware of that I would suggest for improvement.