**Transcript PAF 7**

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
I am at the Open University and I'm a Parliamentary Academic Fellow doing a project for their knowledge exchange unit and I’m asking former PAFS and parliamentary hosts about their experience of the scheme.

The idea is to feed into review of how it could be improved.All identifying marks are going be removed.I'll send you a transcript and then if there's anything you want cut out, just let me know. Just mark it and then I'll do that. Yeah.

PAF 7  
Yeah, it sounds good. Sounds very similar to the interview processes I had to do for mine.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Basically there are three basic stages to it. You know, the pre fellowship process. Just a couple of questions about how you found it during the time. And then there's kind of a post POST process as it were. And then that's it.

And so just casting your mind back. Can you remember what the process was like when you actually applying for your fellowship?

PAF 7  
It felt quite straight forward because you're in the process of doing fellowship applications for all different types of research projects anyway. So it was just another form to fill in in that way.

My university has got a policy and engagement team and staff members that kind of help you with these things help you get the wording right or help you condense text down to make it fit these types of forms. So that was very helpful.

Um and all the information online was clear and the form itself seemed like the questions were reasonable and the things they were asking for were reasonable, I think.

I don't remember being like struggling to fill it out or anything, and then the stuff I worked with at my university makes some minor tweaks, but again, it was just kind of reaffirming that it was OK.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Do you know when you applied?

PAF 7  
Oh, I applied November, October 2020.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
So in the midst of Covid.

PAF 7  
Yeah. Yeah. So I was doing a post doc at the time. And then I started in January 2021.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Was all your fellowship online?

PAF 7  
Yeah, largely. I came to London once or twice. Twice maybe.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Would that be part of the original plan, then?

PAF 7  
Yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Because of the nature of Covid?

PAF 7  
Yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
OK, cool. Just to clarify that cause.

PAF 7  
Yeah. Oh my interviews were online and everything.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Can you remember if you had an induction plan?

PAF 7  
Yeah, I think so. I remember it all being very organised and I remember getting lots of emails about how to write for policymakers?

Um, yeah, working your way around the logistics around Westminster and difference between the House of Commons and the House of Lords and all this sort of training from the knowledge exchange unit. And like that was kind of done in line with the post fellows, the PhD students who come through yeah, cause that was very well established for them. So they just put all the tasks on to that.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And did you have a Parliamentary supervisor?

PAF 7  
I had a POST supervisor. So that was my first contact and I worked very closely with XXX and she was a co-author on my report in the end.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
When did you have regular meetings and all that kind of stuff?

PAF 7  
Yeah, we met every week, every other week. So I worked two days a week, I think. I worked my other job alongside it.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
If you were going to give any advice about things to include in the induction that you would have found helpful.

PAF 7  
Don't think so. I mean for mine, because I had to find my own funding. I felt very if I needed anything, I could just. It's weird one. So like, if deadlines were set that I knew I couldn't meet because I was providing my own funding, I felt no obligation to meet the deadline set to me by POST. To be perfectly honest.

Because I thought you're not paying me. I'm doing this as a like, it's great to have a Parliament referring fellowship. Ultimately, I've found my own funding and like, that's why I don't have to answer to your hard deadlines. Fortunately my supervisor was very flexible with that. And she understood that you have competing priorities and other jobs as well.

But like that was just because of perhaps my personality trying to move me, but I think that is it just made quite a difference if you're during a something like your academic fellowship, that you can have flexible, relatively flexible boundaries of your deadlines and your scope because it can, these things can explode into huge reports.

From day one, having that discussion with your supervisor, but it's something that ultimately the parliamentary activate fellow, you set your boundaries with your supervisor. Whether that be working hours, deadlines, scope for the reports, this kind of thing, I was fortunate that XXX was very good with that and we're both on the same page and I could see that it was a type of thing.

I mean, I worked quite long hours on it, but it was that type of thing there was at risk of you could just really overdo it and like really wear yourself out cause it's a big piece of work to do in the short space of time really.

And especially if it's your first project. First time doing it. You're like learning about how to the writing style and the referencing style and so that's useful.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Then just thinking about a couple of questions about how you found it when you were doing it? Impartiality. Um, was that understood differently between your academic and Parliament, your work?

PAF 7  
Yeah, it is a different. The word impartiality in academia and in the parliamentary work is different. But I think that was well established fairly early on with the various training and through conversations and through my supervisor.

Editing some of my checks, for example, to highlight how you would change it to make it impartial. And that was always kind of like hammered home from the early stage when I was doing the interviews and when I was writing. So I felt that was just something you had to bear in mind throughout, and it was. That's what I found challenging, but also really interesting about the fellowship as a whole.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Just on the challenging bit, in what ways might be challenging?

PAF 7  
Just referencing everything to death so you can't just say you know in 2012 this happened. You have the reference it you know and every sentence basically gets referenced in the end, which is quite an exhausting task and if you don't reference it then you come back to that sentence 4 weeks later. You're like oh no.

I'm so that was a new way of writing for me to just let be super thorough and absolute day one knowing where everything you've written down has come from.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Do you have a social media account or Twitter or anything like that?

PAF 7  
Actually, yeah

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And when you were doing your PAF did that impact on your engagement with Twitter or anything like that, did you think?

PAF 7  
So I don't really. I have a personal Twitter account that I don't really use, but when I was doing my academic fellowship with post and I used it more to engage with the community and to engage with my interviewees and to, as I was finding like sometimes really new reports would come out, so I share them on my Twitter feed and then obviously you start a conversation then with other people in the community and in this kind of thing. So I just use it a lot more.

And then when I stopped, my Parliamentary Academic Fellowship I used it to like disseminate the document but after that and I intended to use it more but I really tried to stay impartial on that as well and quite professional.

I just shared facts. I only kind of shared it for sharing documents and new things that were coming out rather than my personal opinions. You're just trying to be impartial, so I've tried to keep that through my Twitter as well.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Was that driven by yourself?

PAF 7  
Yeah, yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Because as an academic, for example, you might feel I want to criticise government policy, for example.

PAF 7  
Yeah, but like at the start of um, I think at the start of the fellowship we had a bit of a training thing about social media and they asked if we were going … I would I could perfect. I'd be perfectly allowed to voice my opinion about my academic fields.

The Parliament Academic Fellowship scheme was slightly detached from academic field so I didn't post any opinions on that topic, but I wouldn't do that. I don't really post things much anyway, on social media in that way.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Yeah. And if you're going to give guidance on impartiality, how best people should manage it? Would you have any tips?

PAF 7  
I think so. I now do policy engagement as a job rather than academic research. So the one thing we always say is to take this 360 approach, which is to make sure you hear everyone's opinions from all backgrounds with all job types, from any stakeholder who's involved in your topic. And then you can really understand why someone thinks one thing and someone thinks the other thing and see where the classes might be and where the balances might be as well. So we call it 360 approach, but I think that's a really nice way of describing impartiality because you have to listen to everyone in that approach.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Just thinking about your experience, right? And I mean if you were helping to kind of advise on the best way to support academic fellows when they're doing the job right as it were, would you have any advice or suggestions based on your experience?

PAF 7  
Um, because mine was online. I didn't get to meet the other parliamentary academic fellows. Which is a shame. We did have a few dropping coffee sessions and things like this. And it's just nice to meet people in person, and I hope that that's happening more now. I don't know. That's one thing just to kind of see everyone else's experience.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did you meet any of the other Parliamentary Academic Fellows?

PAF 7  
No, not in person.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And what about online?

PAF 7  
We met online. Yeah, we met online a bit, coffee type stuff. And often like because I don't know about your parliamentary academic fellowship, but a lot of people do them part time alongside their academic job.

They might put a coffee morning on a Thursday. Someone might have teaching on a Thursday. Someone else might be, you know, so it's hard because no one's whole time. Right? But having like an away day when you get all your training, maybe get everyone down to London together. I don't know. Or something like this would be good.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
How important would the face to face element be?

PAF 7  
For me it's really important because if you're doing this because you're building a network. Yes, policy people.

Um, and even if they're working on a topic that's different to yours, it's not unlikely that one day you're topics will overlap somehow, and part of this 360 view thing again and just building networks in the policy world is so important to getting your voice heard and just learning about people and learning about different experiences people have had. And you can do it to a degree online and I just personally like in person.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And what about the frequency of meetings with supervisors? What would you say?

PAF 7  
That was good. Yeah. Once a week was really good. But again, that depends on how what portion of your working week is spent on this fellowship, I guess you're only working one day a week. Can you meet every week? You can't get much work done in between.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Okay just thinking about the kind of post POST period. Did you do you know of any outcomes or impacts that your works had and?

PAF 7  
Yeah. So we were lucky enough to work with the XXX Committee. They used the POST brief that I wrote very heavily in putting their inquiry together, they put an invitation inquiry on my topic.

And an inquiry was like largely based around my document, and then they used that to get expertise, expert interviews and all this kind of thing. Fortunately, the XXX Committee, when they're do an inquiry, they do our impact document.

So they had like it's been, you know, the topic has been on this many news items. It's been on the news, it's been in these newspapers. It's a second hand impact, but the inquiry is based on my report, so that was quite nice.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And since you've left your PAF do you hear about any impacts?

PAF 7  
Oh no I don't. I still exchange emails with POST about other things just because I'm a work in policy now. Policy engagement now. So I have an e-mail exchanges with POST for other things and.

And on Twitter, I still followed like the research topic that I did. I still follow it up interest and surfing.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
You say you are working on policy engagement.

PAF 7  
Oh absolutely yeah.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Has the fellowship of any impacts on your own career path or I could in what way?

PAF 7  
And so I was doing, I was doing on my like fifth year of doing postdoctoral research in XXX. And I wasn't really enjoying it. Saw the Parliamentary Academic Fellowship and did it to see what working in policy might be like. I've always been interested. Then halfway through my fellowship, I quit. I got a new job working in research, impacts for air quality and policy engagement in XXX I still do that job. And I have another job that is doing policy engagement for UK. I. So it's had a huge impact.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
And so and was the PAF instrumental in that?

PAF 7  
Oh yeah, I would say so, yeah. I just really enjoyed taking a step back from the XXX research and looking at the bigger picture. For me, that was like the key thing.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Did it fit into academic work at all?

PAF 7  
So the topic of the fellowship. Um and they used so I was on a big network grant, a big programme grant. That's still going and they've put my Parliamentary academic fellowship. On the associated reports is on their output list. They're like achievements list for their programme grant even though I'm not employed on it anymore, but I was at the time. It's kind of positively impacted there.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
This might seem like an odd question. Um, but were there any shortcomings with your fellowship?

PAF 7  
How do you mean? In what way?

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Were there any things you think you think are well, this could have been improved?

PAF 7  
It's not really I mean it was just difficult cause it was during COVID. So it was all remote. It would have been like, I think the best one of the one of the big perks of doing a PAF is to have exposure in Westminster.

PAF 7  
There's one more thing I was going to ask.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Yeah, go on.

PAF 7  
Which was I think it's a bit crazy that the parliamentary, the post or whoever it is, don't provide money to do this fellowship. And you have to find your own funding to do this. I don't know any other fellowships where they just are offering you.

It's just free work. They're not offering you any money. Not offering you anything, and there's just you just coming in this free work. And it's just like as part of.

I don't know. I just think it's not very equal opportunities. It's just kind of promote if you're in the right position, know the right people, you can get money to do a fellowship. And I think that's a bit of a shame that I think for me, it only costs. I think I only had to get 10 or 15 grand to work one or two days a week, you know.

And for a few months, it's not an expensive thing, and like, I don't know if I could get it from UK RI or I don't know, but I just think it's a bit cheeky to not fund it. So I'd like that seen in the feedback.

PRABHAKAR, Rajiv  
Okay cool and the other thing then just to spool him back to a point made earlier then the fact it wasn't funded. But then that shaped your incentive of how can I put it is shaped your work patterns, your it helps you. Their boundaries in the sense that as I'm not being funded.

PAF 7  
Yeah, I own this. This is my job. Yeah. And I think that maybe that's just my approach. I think if they, I just think that they should fund researchers to do research ultimately. And I know that they you only you only allowed to do it if you get research from somewhere. But there's no like even support from Parliament from the scheme to direct you to where you might get that funding or this kind of thing. I think it's a bit of a shame and when it doesn't really cost that much, I don't think it's not like a five year full time. So it will be nice to see them provide a little bit of funding just to support people.