



Scottish Parliament Academic Fellowship Scheme 2025/26

Research into how people access advice and representation to deal with civil justice issues

Context

In its [Programme for Government](#) at the beginning of this parliamentary session (2021-22), the Scottish Government committed to reforming legal aid. This followed on from the report of an independent review – [Rethinking Legal Aid: an independent strategic review](#) (2018).

[Ministers have since retreated from this commitment](#), so that reform involving primary legislation is not expected this parliamentary session. However, the Scottish Government has recently published a [discussion paper outlining some suggestions for shorter and longer-term reform](#)¹.

Nevertheless, there are growing concerns around access to civil legal aid and the impact of cuts to funding for advice services. This is therefore likely to be an area of focus for parliamentary scrutiny in the last year of this parliamentary session and into next.

What a fellowship could do

We're looking to understand more about how people access advice services – such as Citizens Advice Bureaux or local authority services – and/or civil legal aid (including Advice and Assistance) to resolve civil justice issues. A fellowship could explore the current landscape and any barriers people face in getting the support they need in relation to accessing advice services and/or civil legal aid.

Research proposals could look at the whole landscape or just an aspect of it – including a thematic aspect (for example, family law or housing issues). Our initial preference is for proposals which include measurement of access issues via surveys or other use of data. However, we remain open to persuasion that an approach involving only qualitative interviews could provide relevant insights.

How the fellowship process works

At this stage, we envisage that the main output for this work would be a SPICe briefing summarising the research results. The briefing must be written in a clear, accessible and jargon free manner which can be easily used and understood by MSPs.

Depending on parliamentary priorities, there may be other opportunities such as briefings to MSPs and their staff or to a committee engaging in scrutiny of this area.

¹ Scottish Government (2025) [Legal aid reform: discussion paper](#).

There will also be opportunities, if the successful candidate wishes, to work from the Scottish Parliament and to observe a range of parliamentary activities.

This fellowship opportunity is open to anyone with a PhD, regardless of what stage of your academic career you are at. However, applications should highlight candidates' experience in this or related areas.

Timescales

We can discuss a start date with the successful candidate. All work, including a finalised briefing, will have to be completed by the beginning of April 2026.

Funding

It is up to the prospective fellow and their academic institution to set out the basis upon which their costs are determined and the sources of their funding.

Although funding cannot be guaranteed, the Parliament does have a limited budget which it can use to fund or part-fund fellows (previously, funding provided has typically been between £3-4,000). We can discuss funding in more detail with applicants once applications have been submitted and assessed.

Further information

Please contact Angus Evans (angus.evans@parliament.scot) or Abi Bremner (abigail.bremner@parliament.scot) for further information.