



Government Social Research



Sim North

What attracted you to the Fast Stream programme and this particular stream?

The opportunity to move around teams and departments in the Civil Service was a big attraction for me. So were openness and inclusion, which are central to the Fast Stream. I knew I could bring a unique voice to discussions which would be listened to.

The development opportunities and community atmosphere were also big attractions because the scheme offers a significant amount of leadership training.

The Social Research profession appealed to me in particular as it provides the best opportunity for me to put my research skills into practice.

The amazing part about Social Research is the variety of roles on offer – using qualitative and quantitative data to help inform decision-making. As social researchers in government, we are uniquely placed for our research to make an impact.

Tell us a little bit about yourself. What is your degree and how do you feel you can use it in the Civil Service?

Before joining the Fast Stream I was studying Politics and Research Methods in London. I use the skills I learned in my degree every day, whether that's designing and conducting analysis or presenting our findings to stakeholders.

Tell us about your Civil Service Fast Stream experience. What kind of projects have you been involved in?

I have been at the Office for National Statistics for two years. My first posting was in the COVID-19 Infection Survey Analysis division, where I led on engaging with our academic community. This was a great experience in managing and commissioning research, leading a team and developing complex analysis plans. The team was great fun despite the work being highly pressured. They were supportive in me taking on additional responsibilities such as helping out on the slides for the Number 10 COVID-19 briefings.

In my second posting, I have been in a team that conducts rapid, high-impact analysis. This has included exploring really important policy questions using big, linked datasets. I have also been able to reconnect with my qualitative skills in conducting interviews with university students on the impact of the cost of living.

Throughout this time, the Fast Stream has also presented additional opportunities to me. Beyond the training, I have been involved in cross-departmental projects to increase academic engagement in government and have taken on additional responsibilities like managing the ONS Child Statistics Group.

How have the projects you have worked on helped deliver better services for the people of the UK? What was your contribution?

Seeing the slides I worked on presented by Chris Whitty and others highlighted to me the difference you can make working in the Civil Service.

The publications I have worked on have answered key policy questions – even if the answer wasn't the expected outcome. When looking at the link between school quality and criminal justice system outcomes, it was important for the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice to understand that the link was very small.

Did you face any barriers in the application process? How did you overcome them?

The main barrier I faced throughout the application process was a lack of confidence, having failed in the application in previous years. To overcome this, I made sure to understand the Civil Service Behaviours and test out my answers on friends and family.