



EPSRC - Equality Impact Assessment

Question	Response
1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed	Digital Economy (DE) NetworkPlus Call
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event	<p>DE Theme, led by EPSRC, would like to commit up to £13 million to support 5 NetworkPlus grants to allow development of research and communities across the 5 DE theme priorities.</p> <p>This specific call aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring together experts from across all relevant research disciplines and stakeholders, building new communities or creating new links between different existing communities; • Bring focus to the relevant challenge areas and identify the barriers, and new research strategies and opportunities for addressing the challenges; • Initiate preliminary or feasibility research to tackle the challenge; • facilitate highly collaborative Networks with strong engagement within DE; • Engage with interested users of research, including businesses, NGOs, third sector organisations, policy makers, to shape future research directions; • Seek solutions as well as applications of research.
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)	<p>The NetworkPlus Call was developed following consultation with a range of stakeholders.</p> <p>Key stakeholders include UKRI staff, previous NetworkPlus Directors, advisors who sit on related Programme Advisory Board and a wide community survey.</p>
4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?	<p>UK's research community, industrial sector and users of research in non-academic sectors concerned with DE.</p> <p>RO admin staff.</p> <p>UKRI staff.</p> <p>Panel members.</p>
5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual	<p>The call and all associated documents will be available on UKRI website and available to all interested parties to support their applications.</p>

<p>impact of the policy/funding activity/event?</p>	<p>Contact details will be provided to support queries related to the call.</p> <p>A webinar will be organised to discuss the NetworkPlus call requirements with potential applicants. During the webinar there will be an opportunity to answer any queries from potential applicants.</p> <p>The assessment process has been designed to ensure unconscious bias is minimised and managed. All panel members will receive an unconscious bias briefing.</p> <p>Each successful NetworkPlus grant holder will establish an advisory board with an EPSRC project officer on the advisory board. The successful NetworkPlus grants will be requirement to submit regular progress reports to EPSRC detailing their progress against agreed KPIs.</p> <p>Finally, research outcomes will be recorded on ResearchFish.</p>
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As a funder of research, EPSRC remains committed to attracting the best potential researchers from a diverse population into research careers. For policy changes, funding activities and events EPSRC will aim to:

- Select venues that are accessible and where possible accommodate any specific requirement in our planning and organisation of an initiative to support wider participation. This includes for applicants, reviewers, panel members and staff. Included in the interview invitation letter is a request for any access issues to be notified.
- All participants in the process are asked to inform staff if they have any additional needs to enable attendance or participation.
- Offer support for people with caring responsibilities, further details are available [here](#).
- Clearly communicate the timeline and key milestones for funding activities, advertise these widely to reach the largest possible audience.
- Support and encourage panel members to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions. Staff will work closely with the Panel Chair(s) to agree approaches that are designed to minimize opportunities for bias and improve transparency of the decision making process. This includes managing environmental conditions, such as providing appropriate breaks.
- Support flexible working of stakeholders.
- Ensure diversity of peer review assessment and interview panels. Staff will adhere to a mixed panel policy and endeavor to achieve the minimum 30% for the underrepresented gender on the panel.
- Abide by the principles of peer review
- Provide EPSRC staff with tailored unconscious bias training for Peer Review processes and clear guidance for assessors.
- Handle personal sensitive information in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

Protected Characteristic Group	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
Disability	Potential negative	<p>Applicants should seek support from their own institution's research support office.</p> <p>Panel meeting attendees with physical disabilities may have difficulties if meeting venues cannot cater for their needs.</p> <p>Panel meeting attendees with neuro-disabilities may experience difficulties with concentration and focus during panel assessments</p>	<p>Opting to have a virtual panel meeting may address physical difficulties. There is high possibility of future meetings being partially virtual.</p> <p>In the event of an actual meeting, to solicit information from panel meeting participants (in confidence) about any additional requirements they may have in order to fully participate.</p> <p>Ensure that venues offer an accessible and inclusive environment for participants.</p> <p>Depending on the needs identified, considerations might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility for wheelchair users and people with impaired mobility; • Adequate lighting, alternative document formatting and potential use of screen readers for the visually impaired; • Dietary restrictions for those with coeliac, diabetes etc. • Provision of documents in sans-serif, dyslexia-friendly fonts; and dyslexia-friendly formats; • Avoiding colours, lighting etc that may trigger migraines, epilepsy;

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that plenty of breaks are built into the agenda • Ensuring sufficiently bright and spacious rooms • Ensure that venues are easily accessible to main transport links. • Consider paying T&S for carers or support workers to attend alongside the participant, where this is required and not covered by the Individual's own employment contract. • Where there are particular constraints consider opportunities for participants to engage in a different way (via video-link, teleconference for instance)
Gender reassignment	No known negative impact		
Marriage or civil partnership	No known negative impact		
Pregnancy and maternity	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Panel members may not be able to participate in panels due to accessibility issues or maternity leave. Relatively short timescales for the call may affect ability to participate e.g. if on parental leave.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Provision for parental leave (including maternity leave, paternity leave and leave related to surrogacy and adoption) are covered in the UKRI terms and conditions. The call is open for an extended time to facilitate planning and participation.

			<p>The costs of additional childcare for grantholders, beyond that required to meet the normal contracted requirements of the job, and that are directly related to the project, may be requested as a directly incurred cost if the institutional policy is to reimburse them. However, childcare costs associated with normal working patterns may not be sought.</p> <p>Consider whether the venue for the panel meetings are able to provide facilities for breastfeeding/expressing mothers if necessary.</p> <p>Reimbursement of additional childcare costs if the meeting participant is otherwise unable to attend (this could include childcare at the venue, additional hours of childcare in the child's usual setting or paying for a relative to travel to care for school age children)</p>
Race	Potentially negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Unconscious bias Briefing will be given as part of the panel guidance and panel presentation. EPSRC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer</p>

			review.
Religion or belief	Potentially negative	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Participation could be affected by coincidence with religious holidays.</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>A full timeline is provided in the call document. EPSRC endeavours to select dates that a cognisant of major holidays (e.g. deadlines have been extended to avoid full proposal closure over Easter, Passover, Ramadan.)</p> <p>Allowing prayer breaks if requested and provision of prayer area if the meeting is held in person</p>
Sexual orientation	None identified		
Sex (gender)	Potentially negative	<p>Gender bias may be perceived.</p> <p>Use of language can present a barrier to participation and it may be perceived that those with caring responsibilities are disadvantaged. Panel members may be disadvantaged and unable to attend meetings if they have caring responsibilities.</p>	<p>In line with EPSRC policies, the assessment panel will have balanced gender representation</p> <p>Ensure use of gender neutral language in call specification, guidance, etc.</p> <p>EPSRC can provide support to those with caring responsibilities to facilitate their attendance.</p>
Age	Potentially negative	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Researchers that appear younger may be disadvantaged at interview. It may be incorrectly assumed they do not have the necessary experience</p>	<p>Unconscious bias briefing will be given as part of the panel guidance and panel presentation.</p> <p>EPSRC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer review.</p>

		and required track record.	Panel members are briefed to make clear that they should be assessing the application in front of them and not reading between the lines. They should assess an individual's capability to deliver their proposed network.
Additional aspects (not covered by a protected characteristic)	None identified		

Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the proposed change in policy, funding activity or event could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	A number potential negative impacts have been identified and considered as part of the call design. Reasonable adjustments will be made and by adhering to the standard peer review principles the risks have been/will be mitigated as far as possible	
Final Decision:	Tick the relevant box	Include any explanation / justification required
1. No barriers identified, therefore activity will proceed .		
2. You can decide to stop the policy or practice at some point because the data shows bias towards one or more groups		
3. You can adapt or change the policy in a way which you think will eliminate the bias	✓	Refer to the mitigations outlined above
4. Barriers and impact identified, however having considered all available options carefully, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the aim of the policy or practice (e.g. in extreme cases or where positive action is taken). Therefore you are going to proceed with caution with this policy or practice knowing that it may favour some people less than others, providing justification for this decision.		

Will this EIA be published* Yes/Not required (*EIA's should be published alongside relevant funding activities e.g. calls and events:	Yes
Date completed:	24/03/2021
Review date (if applicable):	

Change log

Name	Date	Version	Change
Afia Masood	14/4/2021	1	