

Equality and Inclusion Impact Assessment

STFC uses equality and inclusion impact assessments as a tool to review our funding mechanisms, processes and practices to ensure they are not inadvertently presenting barriers to participation and to reduce the potential for unintentional bias.

Section 1

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| 1. Policy/activity being assessed | <p>STFC Ernest Rutherford Fellowships (ERF) Scheme, including eligibility, nature of the scheme, conditions and the annual selection process including the application, shortlisting and interview stages for the award of ERFs.</p> <p>Ernest Rutherford Fellowships are intended for early career researchers. Applicants should hold a PhD, but not hold a permanent academic position.</p> <p>ERFs provide five years' support for researchers wishing to establish their first independent research group undertaking a programme of excellent research in the STFC core science programme.</p> <p>The scheme is open to applicants of any nationality.</p> |
| 2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/activity | <p>The ERFs enable early career researchers with clear leadership potential to establish a strong independent research programme to become future research leaders in the community. They encourage talented researchers in UK universities to remain in the country and attract outstanding overseas researchers to the UK. They will enable excellent individuals to push the boundaries, pursuing a significant piece of research, leading their research field and making a difference, bringing the next generation of researchers with them.</p> <p>ERFs invest in scientists using the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The excellence of the research achievements of the applicant;• The potential of the individual to lead their research discipline;• The capability to maximise the potential of others and the ability to be, or become, a clear communicator and disseminator of knowledge;• The excellence, timeliness, feasibility, distinctive vision and importance of the proposed research;• Strategic value within the STFC programme <p>The ERF represents part of STFC's commitment to the supply of highly skilled professional research leaders to the UK.</p> |

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| | <p>Applicants will be able to demonstrate great potential and have a scientific career showing a clear upward trajectory. Proposals are assessed by STFC's Fellowship Panel.</p> |
| <p>3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy?</p> | <p>STFC is dedicated to ensuring that the peer review process is open and inclusive. Those engaged in the process endeavour to conduct each stage in a fair manner, without prejudice or bias, In line with this we follow the Nolan Principles. Additionally, comments and suggestions received as part of the peer review survey are implemented where possible to improve the process.</p> <p>The Education Training and Careers Committee (ETCC) advises on the policy related to ERFs and regularly reviews the scheme and its processes. A Programmatic Review was held in 2013 to look at the split of funding across the community which included views from the community. A Balance of Skills programme exercise was carried out in 2017-18 and included fellowship schemes in its remit. It included views on the impact of the scheme and whether it provides funding for the most appropriate career stages in the most appropriate ways. ETCC has provided information and recommendations to both exercises.</p> <p>For Applicants:</p> <p>The call is advertised widely to reach the largest possible audience</p> <p>The call text and guidance provides detailed guidelines to Applicants about the process and has clear eligibility and assessment criteria. It links to the Research Grants Handbook</p> <p>STFC will make available hard copies of documents when required</p> <p>The STFC website conforms to accessibility requirements for websites</p> <p>STFC will support Applicants throughout the process, from pre-submission right through to informing them of the outcome.</p> <p>STFC will make all reasonable efforts to accommodate the requirements of any applicant who is selected to attend an interview, considering issues of accessibility, travel restrictions and alternative working patterns. The STFC team will request details of any such requirements when an applicant is invited for interview.</p> <p>For Reviewers:</p> <p>A wide range of reviewers are approached, and usage and spread is monitored each round</p> <p>Written guidance is available and reviewed annually</p> |

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| | <p>Our guidance clearly states our expectations of reviewers</p> <p>STFC will provide all reasonable support to our reviewers in order to ensure they understand the aims, objectives, and processes of Ernest Rutherford Fellowship scheme.</p> <p>For Panel Members:</p> <p>Pre-meeting discussions take place, STFC staff will work closely with the Panel Chair to agree approaches that are designed to minimise opportunities for bias and improve transparency of the decision making process</p> <p>A presentation on Objective Decision making will be presented reminding panel members of the roles and responsibilities required for them and office staff and to highlight best practice.</p> <p>STFC will ensure that assessment criteria are clear and easily accessible throughout the process, including at the meeting.</p> <p>Everyone involved in the decision-making process is aware of Unconscious Bias and encouraged to undertake training. It is planned that going forward such training will be mandatory</p> <p>STFC endeavour to achieve the minimum 30% female participation and will justify if this isn't the case.</p> <p>STFC enable participation for people with alternative work patterns, including reduced working hours</p> <p>Panel members are asked to inform STFC if they have any additional needs to enable attendance or participation</p> <p>STFC will schedule appropriate breaks and provide refreshments for Panel members</p> <p>For STFC Staff:</p> <p>All STFC staff involved in the process will receive training in unconscious bias to raise awareness of conditions that may impact upon their decision making</p> <p>Venue arrangements when required will be selected for ease of accessibility; will not conflict with different cultures, religions or beliefs; and will offer a full range of sensory accessibility relating to visual and hearing impairments.</p> <p>Catering will be arranged with clear labelling and be appropriate to those who have specific cultural, religious, health or disability needs.</p> |
| 4. Who is affected by the policy? | Anyone who is applying for an Ernest Rutherford Fellowship, panel members , external and internal stakeholders involved in the assessment process. |

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| <p>5. Arrangements for monitoring and reviewing actual impact of the policy</p> | <p>STFC will review this equality impact assessment annually to identify any actions or interventions that are required to improve diversity and inclusion. STFC monitors and analyses data to better understand the diversity of its Community STFC hold an annual application exercise for Panel membership and when published provides guidance on diversity targets Panel membership for each meeting is published on the website</p> <p>Annual statistics on applicants and awards are gathered in respect of gender, age and ethnicity. They are considered by the Education, Training and Careers Committee and are published.</p> <p>Fellows are requested to complete a questionnaire at the end of their fellowship which monitors first destinations. The analysis is monitored by ETCC annually and is published. Data on the research outputs generated by fellows is collected on Research Fish. Membership of the Fellowship Panel is also monitored by gender, age and ethnicity by ETCC. The reviewer pool is reviewed annually to identify any changes required to improve the process.</p> |
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Section 2 – Identifying Impact

| 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) |
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| Disability | Yes – negative impact | <p>Data is collected regarding disability at the ERF application stage. Data is published and measured against HESA community data.</p> <p>Due to the application limits on the number of applications that institutions can submit there is a potential risk of a negative impact during the pre-selection phase in universities.</p> <p>Applicants and/or reviewers with visual disabilities or impairments may find it difficult to access and review electronic documentation.</p> | <p>STFC will take all reasonable steps to make adjustments to the assessment process in order to enable participation. As examples, this may include the use of video conferencing or equivalent tools, tailored timing of the meeting schedule, or provision of specific facilities to enable an applicant or panel member to be comfortable in the meeting environment.</p> <p>Electronic information is accessible and STFC will investigate the ability for the potential use of screen readers for personnel who are visually impaired. For virtual meetings, Zoom follows the latest accessibility standards to ensure it is fully accessible for the latest screen readers. Where other VC programmes are to be used, we will ensure this is also the case.</p> <p>STFC will respond to individual support needs on a case by case basis.</p> <p>STFC consult with all Panel members to understand any specific requirements for participation and will accommodate where required.</p> |

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| | | <p>Applicants or panel members with mobility disabilities may face difficulties in attending the panel meetings.</p> <p>Panel members with hearing difficulties may find it hard to engage in discussions.</p> <p>Attendees with neuro-disabilities may experience difficulties with concentration during panel assessments.</p> | <p>Included in the interview invite letter is a request for any access issues to be notified to STFC so appropriate assistance can be put in place.</p> <p>STFC will ensure the meeting venue is compatible with the use of hearing aid loops and will work with individuals to understand what other help can be provided. For virtual meetings, STFC the use of closed captioning and automatic transcripts is available with Zoom. We will make sure this is also the case where other VC Programmes are to be used.</p> <p>STFC will select a room that is light and airy, ensure that plenty of breaks are built in to the agenda and ensure that colours chosen don't trigger migraines, different colours may assist in this if personnel don't bring their own laptops. More frequent breaks will be scheduled into the agenda for virtual meetings to allow adequate time away from the screen.</p> <p>At interview stage, panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions. Guidance is provided by STFC and this is discussed prior to the interviews starting –, and is annually refreshed with the guidance regarding the circumstances that can result in unintentional bias.</p> <p>STFC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer review. Staff have received unconscious bias training.</p> |
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| | | | <p>We have investigated options for mitigating the risks of bias in the preselection phase in universities (which impacts on most of the protected characteristics). In 2017 we piloted an equality and diversity form for preselected candidates to complete, but the completion rate was very low. Other options for addressing this issue were discussed with the Education, Training and Careers Committee.</p> |
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| Gender reassignment¹ | Yes – negative impact. | Information regarding gender reassignment is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, this may become apparent during the meeting/interview stage or it may be possible that panel members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out. <p>Due to the application limits on the number of applications that institutions can submit there is a potential risk of a negative impact during the pre-selection phase in universities.</p> | Throughout the process and particularly at interview stage, panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are annually refreshed regarding the conditions that can result in unintentional bias. <p>Flexible arrangements such as rescheduling interview times are in place to appropriately support applicants who require time to attend psychiatrist/psychologist appointments or who are undergoing gender reassignment involving medical interventions.</p> <p>STFC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer review.</p> |
| Marriage or civil partnership | Yes - negative impact. | Due to the two body situation those in a marriage or civil partnership may be limited on their choice of host institution. Potential negative impact of the criteria on independence which may favour mobility. | Applicants are requested to state if they are unable to move institutions due to personal reasons so this can be taken into account in the assessment. <p>The scheme also allows for transfer between institutions.</p> |

¹ A person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if the person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physical or other attributes of sex. **Gender reassignment also includes a person who identifies as non-binary or gender fluid.**

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| | | <p>Bias may be voiced in relation to new partners starting a family therefore not given as a high a priority</p> | <p>Panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during meetings acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.</p> |
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| Pregnancy and maternity | Yes – negative impact | <p>This information is not made available to reviewers and assessment panel members throughout the peer review process. At interview stage however it may become apparent to the Panel.</p> | <p>Flexible terms and conditions are in place to support applicants appropriately without discrimination (for example, Fellowships may be held part-time (minimum 50%), may be placed in abeyance to allow for career breaks and may be held flexibly to fit around caring responsibilities. Fellows are also entitled to take maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave in line with the terms and conditions of their employer..</p> |
| | | <p>An applicant's career path and track record may be criticised due to the existence of a number of career breaks due to maternity/paternity.</p> | <p>STFC recognise this issue and the potential impact and will consider as part of the review. The Chair will appropriately moderate discussions and ensure the objective application of the assessment criteria.</p> <p>Applicants are requested to list any career breaks on CV so this can be taken into account in the assessment process. Guidance on taking into account career breaks is provided to reviewers and panel members.</p> <p>STFC consult with all Panel members to understand and cater for their requirements for participation. As a general principle, venues are easily accessible to main rail links.</p> |

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| | <p>Panel members who are pregnant or on parental leave may find it difficult to access the venue and /or participate in meetings.</p> <p>Nursing mothers may need additional support in terms of suitable accommodation or childcare</p> <p>Due to the application limits on the number of applications that institutions can submit there is a potential risk of a negative impact during the pre-selection phase in universities. For example, prior career breaks may have a negative impact on the assessment of track record.</p> | <p>Meetings are timetabled to allow for adequate breaks.</p> <p>Adjustments are made throughout the assessment process where appropriate e.g. regarding interview attendance to assist individual applicants and panel members. This may include the use of video conferencing and provision of suitable accommodation for nursing mothers. Whenever possible, panel meetings will be scheduled to avoid school holidays.</p> <p>Throughout the process and particularly at interview stage, panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are annually refreshed regarding the conditions that can result in unintentional bias.</p> <p>Panel members are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting.</p> <p>STFC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer review.</p> <p>STFC will reimburse additional childcare costs, above any beyond that required during normal working hours</p> |
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| | | <p>Panel members may face additional childcare costs if having to work outside of their normal hours.</p> | <p>A return to research bursary is also available for those returning from a career break who can apply for funds to help them develop a suitable application for an ERF.</p> <p>Applicants who are returning from a career break are encouraged to apply. Candidates are judged on their track record prior to the break from research.</p> |
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| Race | Yes – negative impact | <p>Data is collected regarding race at the ERF application stage. This is analysed by ETCC and is also published.</p> <p>Information regarding race is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, it may be possible that panel members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out. At interview stage however it may become apparent to the Panel.</p> <p>Due to the application limits on the number of applications that institutions can submit there is a potential risk of a negative</p> | <p>Scheme is open to applicants of any nationality.</p> <p>At interview stage, panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting.</p> <p>STFC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer review.</p> <p>The guidance will be reviewed to ensure that it is clearly worded and accessible to as wide a range of potential applicants as possible.</p> |
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| | | impact during the pre-selection phase in universities. If the scheme guidance is not clear this could disproportionately impact on its accessibility to non-UK applicants. | |
| Religion or belief | Yes – negative impact | <p>This information is not made available to reviewers and assessment panel members throughout the peer review process. At interview stage however it may become apparent to the Panel.</p> <p>Applicants and panel members may be unable to attend interviews or shortlisting meetings due to religious observances.</p> <p>Panel members or attendees may have specific dietary requirements due to religious belief.</p> <p>Due to the application limits on the number of applications that institutions can submit there is a potential risk of a negative</p> | <p>Throughout the process and particularly at interview stage, panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting.</p> <p>Consideration would be given to the timing of interviews/panel meetings so that panel members and suitable applicants from different religious communities can attend if requested.</p> <p>STFC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer review.</p> <p>The criteria for selection of panel meeting venues includes a consideration of catering and dietary requirements.</p> |

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| | | impact during the pre-selection phase in universities. | |
| Sexual orientation | Yes – negative impact | <p>Information regarding sexual orientation is not made available throughout the peer review process. However, it may be possible that panel members already know this information or could endeavour to seek it out. It may also become apparent during the interview stage. Due to the application limits on the number of applications that institutions can submit there is a potential risk of a negative impact during the pre-selection phase in universities.</p> | <p>Throughout the process and particularly at interview stage, panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting.</p> <p>STFC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer review.</p> |

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| Sex (gender)² | Yes negative impact | <p>Data is collected regarding gender identity at the ERF application stage.</p> <p>Panel members and reviewers may criticise a publication rate and track record affected by extended maternity or paternity leave.</p> <p>This information is not made available to reviewers and assessment panel members throughout the peer review process. However, it is likely to be apparent in most cases through the application paperwork and particularly at interview stage.</p> <p>Negative perceptions of an applicant's gender may be expressed by a peer reviewer or a panel member.</p> | <p>STFC are committed to ensuring that Panel Chairs are briefed on how to handle such situations.</p> <p>At interview stage, panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting.</p> <p>STFC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer review.</p> <p>Gender balance is taken into account when appointing the Fellowships Panel and also on the interview panel. This is published and monitored by ETCC. Gender balance is also taken into account when appointing ETCC members.</p> <p>Gender balance is also taken into account when appointing the reviewer pool. This is monitored annually and suggestions for reviewers to fill gaps are sought.</p> <p>See also the section on pregnancy and maternity for policies in place to support pregnant and nursing mothers and other carers, including</p> |
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² Although the definitions of the Equality Act 2010* are set out as per above comment, at UK Research and Innovation we recognise all gender identities and sexualities including asexual and intersex people. *The definition of gender reassignment was extended in September 2020 to include people who identify as non-binary or gender fluid – recognising that gender is a spectrum.

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| | | <p>Due to the application limits on the number of applications that institutions can submit there is a potential risk of a negative impact during the pre-selection phase in universities.</p> | <p>those related to mitigating the effect of pregnancy/caring responsibilities on track record.</p> |
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| Age | Yes – negative impact | <p>Panel members, reviewers may cite age in terms of lack of experience</p> <p>Due to the application limits on the number of applications that institutions can submit there is a potential risk of a negative impact during the pre-selection phase in universities.</p> <p>Data is collected regarding age at the ERF application stage.</p> <p>Younger applicants are likely to have a lower publication rate making them less competitive.</p> <p>This information is not made available to reviewers and assessment panel members throughout the peer review process. At interview stage however it may become apparent to the Panel.</p> | <p>Throughout the process and particularly at interview stage, panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions, and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC presence at assessment meetings and during interviews acts as an additional assurance to help ensure unbiased peer review.</p> <p>STFC tracks the age and number of years of research experience of those applying for and those awarded ERFs..</p> <p>The Assessment criteria for the ERF call are not linked to age</p> <p>There was a potential negative impact due to the requirement for a minimum amount of postdoctoral experience. For this reason we have removed the requirement and replaced it with a statement of the experience and capabilities expected of fellows. This will still mean that younger, less experienced applicants will be less likely to succeed, but will help ensure the assessment is based on criteria related to demonstrable research excellence and potential, rather than discriminating on the basis of age <i>per se</i>.–</p> |
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Date
June 2021