

Equality Impact Assessment – ESRC Research Grants Scheme

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is committed to promoting equality and participation in all their activities, whether this is related to the work we do with our external stakeholders or whether this is related to our responsibilities as an employer. As a public body, we are also required to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations when making decisions and developing policies. To do this, it is necessary to understand the potential impacts of the range of internal and external activities on different groups of people.

What is an Equality Impact Assessment and why does UKRI use it?

When developing a new scheme, or considering changes to an existing one, UKRI will carry out an equality impact assessment to review how it may affect particular groups or individuals and will take the findings into account. We expect that very rarely our actions will create barriers to participation. The assessment may however flag issues that are not of UKRI's making but we will, where it is in our remit to do so, recommend actions and adjustments. Some impacts are not exclusive to the scheme or change that is being evaluated and need to be addressed throughout our organisation. In some cases we may not have enough expertise and we will consult with others.

Our leadership and building on good practice

It is our ambition to be recognised as a leader in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and to build on our record of achievements to date, following on from the RCUK, Innovate UK and HEFCE action plans. These plans are updated from time to time and Equality Impact Assessments will help us to prioritise actions.

Current good practice that is relevant to the Research Grants Scheme includes our:

- Grant terms and conditions, including recognition for sick leave and all forms of parental leave
- Unconscious Bias Awareness Raising for all panel members at Induction (and commitment to train peer reviewers once the UKRI training materials are released)

There are multiple dimensions/aspects to this Equality Impact Assessment:

- 1) Ensuring that the eligibility criteria are clear and objectively justified
- 2) Ensuring that the submission, peer review and awarding processes are free from unintentional bias (the decisions are made by the Grants Delivery Group in light of recommendations from the Grant Assessment Panels).
- 3) The identification of any potential barriers to attendance and participation in the call and the assessment and awarding process as below
 - a. Meeting duration – Appropriate duration to facilitate good environmental conditions for assessment and inclusion
 - b. Venue location and arrangements to accommodate needs

- c. Broad ranging panel membership
 - d. Meeting management/Chair/robust assessment criteria
- 4) Ongoing monitoring of this major investment through the Grants Delivery Group, who scrutinise panel data to ensure equitable treatment across disciplines, introducers and panels.

Question	Response
1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed	ESRC Research Grants Scheme (a.k.a. Standard Grants, Open Call)
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event	<p>The ESRC Research Grants (open call) invites proposals from eligible individuals and research teams for standard research projects, large-scale surveys and other infrastructure projects and for methodological developments. The call offers researchers considerable flexibility to focus on any subject area or topic providing that it falls within ESRC's remit. Proposals can draw from the wider sciences, but the social sciences must represent more than 50 per cent of the research focus and effort.</p> <p>We particularly encourage ambitious and novel research proposals addressing new concepts and techniques and those with the potential for significant scientific or societal and economic impact. We are also keen to encourage fresh ideas from new researchers and appropriate proposals are welcomed from those with limited research experience.</p> <p>Our funding decisions are based on a number of criteria including quality, timeliness, potential impact and value for money.</p> <p>The call is for applications ranging from £350,000 to £1 million (100 per cent full economic cost (fEC)) for a period of up to five years. Applicants can submit proposals to the call at any time - there are no fixed closing dates.</p>
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)	<p>Consultation with the GAP Secretariat</p> <p>Consultation with the ESRC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group</p> <p>Consultation (by correspondence) with members of the Grants Delivery Group (including panel chairs and a member of the ESRC Council)</p>
4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?	<p>Applicants to the Research Grants scheme (Social Science Researchers across the academic life-course are eligible to apply).</p> <p>Grant Assessment Panel Members and ESRC staff attending the GAP and GDG meetings.</p>

5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?

The scheme is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis by the Grants Delivery Group which meets three times a year following Grants Assessment Panel meetings to make funding decisions, scrutinise panel outcomes and discuss policy issues relating to the schemes it is responsible for.

GENERAL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

ESRC's standard Grant Assessment Panel process is designed with fairness in mind.

Eligibility and criteria

- The Research Grants scheme is open to all eligible research organisations (RO). Applicants are eligible for funding whether or not they are established members of a recognised RO, but applicants who are not an established member of a recognised RO must be accommodated by the RO and provided with appropriate facilities to carry out the research.
- Track record is not a funding criterion for the scheme, and panels are briefed that they should not pay particular attention to track record of applicants. Whilst track record should play into panel decisions it should not be emphasised to the extent that innovative / potentially high impact work by less established researchers is disadvantaged. Panels are instructed to assess the application in front of them and not to 'read between the lines' or give the benefit of the doubt based on the reputation of the individual applicant or team, as this would be a form of confirmation bias.

Standard Grant Terms and Conditions:

- UKRI standard Grant Terms and Conditions comply with UK equality legislation and include provisions designed to mitigate against potential negative impacts (e.g. sick pay, parental and adoption leave, the possibility of part-time and flexible working, and grant extensions).
- Research Organisations are subject to equality legislation and have a duty to comply with it. RGC 8 states that 'The Research Organisation must assume full responsibility for staff funded from the grant and, in consequence, accept all duties owed to and responsibilities for these staff, including, without limitation, their terms and conditions of employment and their training and supervision, arising from the employer/employee relationship.' Universities are therefore required to make reasonable adjustments as required to support their staff.

Panel recruitment:

- Panel members are appointed, first and foremost, based on expertise. Our shortlisting process looks only at expertise/fit to vacancy and track record. We do not know the ethnicity/race, disability status or other protected characteristics for applicants as equal opportunities monitoring forms are detached from the applications and remain anonymous. Final decisions take into account trying to balance the panels by gender and geography (to ensure UK-wide representation) and seek to ensure a diversity of career stage and institutions. We will only make recruitment decisions which compromise diversity when it is objectively justified by the necessity to ensure the required breadth of subject expertise with high quality candidates.
- We aim to ensure that the composition of the panels are diverse, with each panel having at least a 60:40 gender balance, and if this is not possible we seek to ensure that there is a 60:40 gender balance across the GAPs as a whole.
- Where possible we ensure that the chair and vice chair of each panel are not the same gender.
- We encourage applicants across the full range of protected characteristics, and following each recruitment round we look at panel composition by race/ethnicity and disability status

and consider if we need to take additional action at the subsequent recruitment round (for instance, targeted advertising). We do not impose quotas.

Process

- The ESRC Peer Review College should be the first source of peer reviewers consulted by ESRC staff. All members of the ESRC community are encouraged to complete the ESRC peer review training tool which is mandatory for Peer Review College members. The training tool outlines the ESRC’s standard peer review process and emphasises the importance of timely, objective, fair and informed peer review.
- The membership of the Peer Review College aims to reflect the community it represents and effort are made to achieve an appropriately balanced membership in terms of gender, age, ethnic origin etc.
- Where it is not possible to secure the necessary peer review from within the college membership ESRC case officers will look beyond the college membership.
- Peer reviewers are required to evidence their views and scores. ESRC staff conduct usability checks on all peer review comments and where there is evidence of bias or a reviewer has failed to provide evidence for their scores the review will be marked as ‘unusable’.
- All panel members participate in an induction and training session which covers issues including fairness, objectivity and unconscious bias.
- It is the role of panel members to moderate and assess the quality of peer review and to agree final scores for each proposal. Panel members are briefed on unconscious bias and encouraged to feel empowered to constructively challenge potential bias where they identify it. The Panel Chairs and Panel Secretaries play a particularly important role in this respect. An implementation intention statement is read out at the beginning of each meeting which sets the tone for discussions and requires that panel members pay close attention to the scoring criteria and definitions.
- For each proposal we appoint two academic panel introducers who formally assess and score the proposal, and three readers (two academics and one user member) who are asked to participate in discussions in order to ensure that a diverse range of views are represented.

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 (both mental and physical)	Potential negative	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Je-S does not currently comply with disability accessibility schemes. This will be picked up by the Research and Innovation Funding Service (RIFS) project.</p> <p>Applicants should seek support from</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>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</p>

		<p>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>for participants. Depending on the needs identified, considerations might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility for wheelchair users and people with impaired mobility; • Induction loops for the hearing impaired; • 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; • 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.
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider paying T&S for carers or support workers to attend alongside the participant (supplementing, not replacing, their employer's contractual obligations). • Where there are particular constraints consider opportunities for participants to engage in a different way (via video-link, tele-conference for instance).
Gender reassignment	Potential negative	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Trans people may be absent from work as a consequence of transition and UKRI records may show the wrong gender.</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>UKRI terms and conditions are flexible in nature and absence as a result of medical treatment. We would expect that absence related to transition would be covered by the Research Organisation's sick policy and strongly encourage ROs to treat absence relating to transition like any other sick absence.</p> <p>Consideration needs to be given at UKRI level as to how records (including Gateway to Research and other communications materials) might be adjusted.</p>
Marriage or civil partnership	Probably not.		

<p>Pregnancy and maternity</p>	<p>Potential negative</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Provision for parental leave (including maternity leave, paternity leave and leave related to surrogacy and adoption) are covered in the UKRI terms and conditions.</p> <p>We should ensure the use of gender neutral language – parental leave, irrespective of sexual orientation.</p> <p>The costs of additional childcare for grant-holders, 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 GAP meeting is 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</p>
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			paying for a relative to travel to care for school age children).
Race (including ethnicity)	Potential negative	See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations (particularly in relation to panel composition and mitigations against unconscious bias)
Religion or belief	Potential negative	See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. There could be potential discrimination because it is known that somebody (either a panel member, a research applicant or research participants) has a particular faith or belief.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations (particularly in relation to panel composition and mitigations against unconscious bias) Ensure that religious observances are taken into account when planning panel meetings. Considerations might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduling meetings to avoid major religious festivals; (if impossible to avoid then consider mitigations – ie. during Ramadan ensuring that meetings finish early so that participants are able to get home to break their fast, awareness of the sensitivities around offering Muslims meals during periods of fasting); • Accommodating dietary restrictions (ensuring that there is

			<p>sufficient choice to allow all participants to eat – recognising that some groups cannot eat pork or beef or shellfish, that others avoid caffeine, ensuring that vegetarian food is available if Kosher or Halal food is not provided) etc.;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not scheduling meetings such that they would require travel late on Friday evenings (Jewish Sabbath) or on Fridays (Friday prayer, Islam) • Allowing prayer breaks if requested
Sexual orientation	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.
Sex (gender)	Potential negative	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Use of language can present a barrier to participation and it may be perceived that those with caring responsibilities are disadvantaged.</p> <p>Panel members may be disadvantaged and unable to attend meetings if they have caring responsibilities</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Ensure use of gender neutral language in call specification, guidance, etc.</p> <p>Ensure that the panel has balanced gender representation (aim for no higher than 60:40 split)</p> <p>Ensure that the meeting location is suitable to allow easy return home</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)
Age		<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Early career researchers* may be disadvantaged as they don't have the same track record to draw on as an experienced researcher.</p> <p>(*It is assumed that early career researchers are generally younger than their more experienced peers, although this by no means always the case. This is why this point has been included under 'age').</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Track record is not an explicit criterion, given likely relationship to career stage and hence (indirectly) age. 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 research.</p> <p>Use of a variety of different communication strategies including social media to ensure that our messages reach the widest possible target audience.</p>
Other characteristics not protected under the Equality Act	Potential negative. ESRC is committed to go above and beyond bare compliance with Equalities legislation to ensure that our processes are as fair and equitable as they can be. For instance, we wish to ensure that potential applicants and stakeholders are not		ROs need to be clear of their responsibilities and duty of care to their employees. The Research funding guide states: 'The Research Organisation is responsible for compliance with the terms of the Equality Act 2010 including any subsequent amendments introduced

	<p>disadvantaged by geography, institutional status etc.</p>		<p>while work is in progress; and for ensuring that the expectations set out in the RCUK statement of expectations for equality and diversity are met’.</p> <p>Call specifications should draw attention to ESRC’s aspirations around ED&I. Applicants should be alerted to the fact that if they wish to participate in an ESRC-led activity but find that they are barred from doing so as a consequence of ED&I considerations they should contact the office for advice.</p> <p>We work to ensure that panels are balanced as far as possible (within the constraints of quality and appropriateness) across the range of protected characteristics, and across broader characteristics including participation from post-1992 and Russell Group institutions, ensuring that we have a good geographical spread of panel members across the four nations of the UK, and across a diversity of career stages and paths.</p>
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Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the proposed policy or activity or change in policy or activity could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	See the potential negative impacts outlined above.	
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	✓	See 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:	October 2019
Review date (if applicable):	Annually, or if any significant changes are made to the scheme.