

Equality Impact Assessment – Forensic Science for the Justice System Sandpit

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is committed to promoting equality and participation in all its 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 Forensic Science for the Justice System Sandpit includes our:

- EDI throughout the sandpit process, including participants selection, mentor selection, sandpit planning and guidance for our assessment panel.
- Grant terms and conditions, including recognition for sick leave and all forms of parental leave

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, participants selection, panel review and awarding processes are free from unintentional bias
- 3) The identification of any potential barriers to attendance and participation in the sandpit 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 mentor group to form our assessment panel

d. Meeting management/Director/robust assessment criteria

Question	Response
<p>1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed</p>	<p>Forensic Science for the Justice System Sandpit. The sandpit will be held virtually.</p>
<p>2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event</p>	<p>The broad aims of the sandpit are to generate research proposals which can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form new collaborations between researchers and innovators across the forensic science community; • Create new and innovative research ideas to challenges; • Allow researchers to pitch projects for seed funding to test ideas; • Address the key research challenges that are identified; • Consider co-design with end-users; • Address the current issues around scale up and application to the justice system
<p>3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g., with relevant groups and stakeholders)</p>	<p>We have reviewed other Equality Impact Assessments published for UKRI calls, spoken to colleagues who have run successful programmes and consulted internally with the EDI group to ensure the assessment is comprehensive.</p> <p>External consultation around the call and specification has taken place with relevant identified external stakeholders.</p> <p>Cross UKRI consultation with EPSRC, BBSRC, STFC and Innovate UK.</p>
<p>4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK HEIs • Admin Staff • Academics from across disciplines relevant to the funding opportunity • UKRI staff • Director and mentors that will make up our assessment panel
<p>5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?</p>	<p>A Call for participant Expression of Interest (Eoi) for the sandpit will be open via Survey Monkey, available on UKRI website and available to all interested parties to support their applications.</p> <p>Contact details will be provided alongside the information relevant to the sandpit to support queries related to the call.</p> <p>We will ensure that we publish the call as soon as possible to ensure that academics have time to apply to attend the sandpit and we will advertise the sandpit widely.</p> <p>The assessment process, of both the sandpit member selection and the peer review of the proposed projects, will be designed to ensure any unconscious bias will be identified, challenged and managed.</p>

	<p>We will share Unconscious Bias briefing information with the mentors/Director who will make up the assessment panel.</p> <p>We will also encourage people from a diverse range of backgrounds to attend the sandpit event. We will do this by including wording in the call document and including this as part of the selection process for selection of attendees</p>
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GENERAL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

As a funder of research, UKRI remains committed to attracting the best potential researchers from a diverse population into research careers. For policy changes, funding activities and events UKRI 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.
- We will encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply for the sandpit and diversity of background will be considered when selecting participants to attend.
- 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 through all available channels.
- Support and encourage panel members to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions. Staff will work closely with the sandpit Director 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 endeavour to achieve the minimum 30% for the underrepresented gender on the panel.
- Abide by the principles of peer review
- Handle personal sensitive information in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation 2018.
- Further details on UKRI's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work can be found [here](#).

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)	Potentially negative	People with visual or hearing disabilities may find it difficult to access and view/hear the online materials.	The virtual element of the sandpit will contain appropriate breaks. We will ensure that it is possible to print the online documents and they are in a form that text can be enlarged, and any information displayed by screen sharing can be zoomed as needed. Image

		<p>Je-S does not currently comply with disability accessibility schemes. This will be picked up by The Funding Service.</p> <p>Panel meeting attendees with neuro-disabilities may experience difficulties with concentration and focus during panel assessments.</p>	<p>descriptions will also be made available.</p> <p>Captions will also be used for the hearing impaired.</p> <p>We will avoid colours, lighting that may trigger migraines, epilepsy</p> <p>Frequent breaks will also be built into the agenda and we have spaced our 5 sessions out across 5 weeks</p> <p>Applicants will also be able to request materials ahead of the sandpit.</p>
Gender reassignment	Potential negative	<p>Trans people may be absent from work as a consequence of transition and UKRI records may show the wrong gender.</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 medical 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>This is unlikely to have an effect on the inclusion of those who are married or in civil partnerships.</p>	
Pregnancy and maternity	Potential negative	<p>Participation in the sandpit may be negatively affected if potential applicants</p>	<p>Full timeline provided of all key milestones, allowing early engagement with UKRI on specific</p>

		<p>or mentor reviewers are unavailable at key stages.</p> <p>Inability to attend due to childcare commitments may affect who can participate.</p>	<p>mitigations. UKRI will do its best to accommodate adjustments.</p> <p>UKRI offers support available for people with caring responsibilities and reimbursement of childcare costs if the participant is unable to attend. Individuals should get in contact with UKRI if they have any queries.</p> <p>We should ensure the use of gender-neutral language – parental leave, irrespective of sexual orientation.</p> <p>Sandpits are intense with a high cognitive load. Sufficient rest time will be allocated to the sandpit agenda, and any specific requirements for rest can be taken into consideration by UKRI. Participants will also be able to turn off their cameras if they need additional breaks.</p>
Race (including ethnicity)	Potential negative		<p>We will encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply for the sandpit and diversity of backgrounds will be considered when selecting participants to attend. We will also share guidance with mentors on unconscious bias.</p>
Religion or belief	Potential negative	<p>Participation in call may be affected, if potential applicants or mentors are unavailable at key assessment stages. (Activities could coincide with religious holidays, for example).</p>	<p>UKRI will ensure that religious observances are taken into account. A full timeline will be provided of all key milestones, allowing early engagement with UKRI on specific mitigations. UKRI will do its best to accommodate adjustments.</p>
Sexual orientation	No known negative impact.		
Sex (gender)	Potential negative		<p>We will encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply for the sandpit and diversity of background will be considered</p>

			<p>when selecting participants to attend.</p> <p>In line with UKRI policy we will aim to ensure fair representation across genders. We will aim for (at worst 60/40 split across our mentors. We will also endeavour to ensure gender balance within participants at the sandpit.</p>
Age	Potential negative or positive depending on scheme eligibility requirements		<p>We will encourage people from diverse backgrounds to apply for the sandpit and diversity of background will be considered when selecting participants to attend.</p> <p>We will also consider individuals from different career stages at the participants selection and mentor selection stage. Track record is not an explicit criterion, given the likely relationship to career stage (indirectly age). Mentors will be 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>
Other characteristics not protected under the Equality Act	People with caring responsibilities	Dependent on individual circumstances	<p>As this is a virtual meeting, it is hoped that the event's impact on caring responsibilities is minimised through the option of participants to participate remotely from home.</p> <p>We will try to ensure participants present cover a range of geographical locations.</p> <p>UKRI can offer support for people with caring responsibilities. It is an individual's responsibility to check with UKRI and confirm what costs can be reimbursed prior to attendance at an event. Further details here.</p>

Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification
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Is it possible the proposed change in policy, funding activity or event could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	A number of risks have been identified and actively considered as part of the sandpit call design and internal management processes for call delivery. These risks have been 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	✓	See the mitigations outlined above. Further risks that are brought to the attention of UKRI as the process proceeds will be addressed and this policy updated.
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:	16/01/2023
Review date (if applicable):	Re-evaluate prior to the participant selection to check for EDI and again at the end of the sandpit to cover any lessons learned to feed into future calls.