

## **Equality Impact Assessment Guidance - 2022/2023 Centres Outline Call**

The Research Councils are 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 public authorities 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 (EIA) and why do we need to complete one?**

An equality impact assessment (EIA) is an evidence-based approach designed to help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, events and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups from participation. This covers both strategic and operational activities.

The term 'policy', as used throughout this document, covers the range of functions, activities and decisions for which your organisation is responsible, including for example, strategic decision-making, arranging strategy & funding panels, conferences, training courses and employment policies.

The EIA will help to ensure that:

- we understand the potential effects of the policy by assessing the impacts on different groups both external and internal
- any adverse impacts are identified and actions identified to remove or mitigate them
- decisions are transparent and based on evidence with clear reasoning.

### **When might I need to complete an EIA?**

Whether an EIA is needed or not will depend on the likely impact that the policy may have and relevance of the activity to equality. The EIA should be done when the need for a new policy or practice is identified, or when an existing one is reviewed. Depending on the type of policy or activity advice can be sought from either your HR team, your Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team, your Peer Review Policy team or their equivalents.

**Ideally, an EIA should form part of any new policy, event or funding activity and be factored in as early as one would for other considerations such as risk, budget or health and safety.**

### **Who is responsible for completing and signing off the EIA?**

Depending on the nature of the policy, event or funding activity, the responsibility of who should complete the assessment, who should be consulted, and who should sign off the EIA will vary. Ultimate responsibility on whether an EIA is required and the evaluation decision(s) made after completing the EIA lies with the Senior Responsible Officer, budget holder, project board or the most relevant senior manager. Further advice is available from your Equality, Diversity & Inclusion contact.

## **What is discrimination?**

Discrimination is where someone is treated less favourably or put at a disadvantage because of their protected characteristic. The different groups covered by the Equality Act are referred to as protected characteristics: disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, sex (gender), and age.

Discrimination is usually unintended and can often remain undetected until there is a complaint. Improving or promoting equality is when you identify ways to remove barriers and improve participation for people or groups with a protected characteristic.

## **Building the evidence, making a judgement**

In cases of new policies or management decisions there may be little evidence of the potential effect on protected characteristic groups. In such cases you should make a judgement that is as reliable as possible. Consultation will strengthen these value judgements by building a consensus that can avoid obvious prejudices or assumptions.

## **Consultation**

Consultation can add evidence to the assessment. Consultation is very important and key to demonstrating that organisations are meeting the equality duties, but it also needs to be proportionate and relevant. Considering the degree and range of consultation will safeguard against 'groupthink' by involving a diverse range of consultees. These are the key considerations, to avoid over-consultation on a small policy or practice and under-consultation on a significant policy or an activity that has the potential to create barriers to participation.

## **Provisional Assessment**

At the initial stages, you may not have all the evidence you need so you can conduct a provisional assessment. Where a provisional assessment has been carried out, there must be plans to gather the required data so that a full assessment can be completed after a reasonable time. The scale of these plans should be proportionate to the activity at hand. When there is enough evidence a full impact assessment should be prepared. Only one EIA should be created for each policy, as more evidence becomes available the provisional assessment should be built upon.

## **Valuing Differences**

EIAs are about making comparisons between groups of employees, service users or stakeholders to identify differences in their needs and/or requirements. If the difference is disproportionate, then the policy may have a detrimental impact on some and not others.

***'You are looking for bias that can occur when there are significant differences (disproportionate difference) between groups of people in the way a policy or practice has impacted on them, asking the question "Why?" and investigating further'.<sup>1</sup>***

## **Evaluation Decision**

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/s/n/Acas\\_managers\\_guide\\_to\\_equality\\_assessments.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/s/n/Acas_managers_guide_to_equality_assessments.pdf)

There are four options open to you:

1. No barriers or impact identified, therefore activity will **proceed**.
2. You can decide to **stop** the policy or practice at some point because the evidence 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, or
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.

In most cases, where disproportionate disadvantage is found by carrying out EIAs, policies **and practices are usually changed or adapted. In these cases, or when a change has been justified** you should consider making a record on the project risk register.

**Examples of recently completed EIA templates can be found in annex 1.**

Please send completed EIAs to [EDI@esrc.ukri.org](mailto:EDI@esrc.ukri.org)

## Equality Impact Assessment

Question	Response
<p><b>1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed</b></p>	<p>2023 Centres Competition</p>
<p><b>2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event</b></p>	<p>ESRC is looking for Centres that deliver challenge-led research, bringing together the right people, disciplines, institutions and infrastructure to respond to that challenge within a 5-year timeframe. This is an open call where applications can respond to any societal or economic challenge that can be addressed through social science research. At least 50% of the proposed programme of research must fall within ESRC’s remit. There are also three steered Centres competitions being run through the same process, which include partners across UKRI.</p> <p>Although all the Centres delivered through both the open opportunity and the steered opportunities will be based at a UK research organisation, there may be the inclusion of international co-investigators and collaborators.</p> <p>ESRC Centres deliver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ research: ESRC centres should deliver high-quality, interdisciplinary, internationally-recognised research findings to address unanswered questions about a defined challenge to our society, economy or both</li> <li>▪ impact: ESRC centres should have significant economic and societal impact, demonstrating that the centre is responding to their specified challenge. Impact should be a major consideration throughout the scoping of a proposal, and during and beyond the lifetime of a centre. Research users should be engaged from the initial planning phases through to the end of an award</li> <li>▪ capability: ESRC centres should develop the resources needed to become a centre of excellence that adds value to the wider community. This will include developing the people, producing the data and creating the infrastructure needed to respond to their specified challenge</li> </ul>

Question	Response
<p><b>3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)</b></p>	<p>ESRC runs an open call for Centres approximately every two years. We have made changes to the scope of this year's competition and updated our guidance in response to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feedback from the research community gathered via engagement sessions with Research Organisations</li> <li>• feedback from ESRC staff involved in the commissioning of previous ESRC Centres</li> <li>• a review of equivalent schemes run by other funding organisations, including the Medical Research Council's unit investments</li> <li>• a review of management information from previous ESRC Centres competitions</li> </ul> <p>The three steered Centres competitions were developed with input from a wide variety of stakeholders, including government departments and academics from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds and methodological expertise. All three steered competitions also reflect the input of colleagues from Councils across UKRI via a series of working groups and programme boards that oversee the strategic themes announced in UKRI's Strategy 2022-27.</p> <p>We have also consulted staff in EDI roles within UKRI to ensure our EIA is appropriate and that the commissioning process has been designed with EDI considerations in mind (e.g. inclusive research design and EDI incorporated into assessment criteria).</p>
<p><b>4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants to the 2023 Centres Call (both open and steered).</li> <li>• Research office staff in organisations eligible for UKRI funding</li> <li>• Commissioning Panel Members, interview panel members and peer reviewers for the 2023 Centres competitions.</li> <li>• ESRC and other UKRI staff working on and attending meetings for 2023 Centres Call.</li> <li>• There will likely be significant interaction with government, industry and civil society organisations as the funding opportunity encourages applicants to develop partnerships with non-higher education institution organisations where appropriate.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?</b></p>	<p>Contact details will be provided to support queries related to the call.</p> <p>The diversity of the assessment panels will be reviewed as the panel is compiled.</p>

Question	Response
	<p>Panels will include experts and practitioners from the academic and evidence user communities. Panel members will receive guidance on fair and objective assessments.</p> <p>In addition, EDI considerations will be included in the feedback form for panel members after the meeting.</p> <p>EDI characteristics among successful/unsuccessful applicants will be assessed as part of the review process at the end of the call.</p> <p>Grant holders will be required to regularly report on their progress and participate in monitoring and evaluation activity that measures the impact of their centres.</p> <p>The gender balance of the panel will be reviewed as it is compiled.</p>

## GENERAL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

ESRC's research commissioning processes are designed with fairness in mind.

### Eligibility and criteria

- The 2023 Centres Call 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.

### 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:

- We will aim to ensure that the composition of the commissioning panel is diverse, with at least a 60:40 gender balance.
- We will ensure (if possible) that the chair and vice chair of the commissioning panel are not the same gender.
- Whilst peer reviewers and panel members are appointed, first and foremost, based on expertise, we will aim to appoint a diverse membership. Final decisions take into

account trying to balance the panels by gender and geography 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.

- A tool has been developed which allows ESRC staff to assess the EDI characteristics of commissioning panels, and this will be used when appointing panels.

## **Process**

- All peer reviewers and panel members will receive the code of practice and guidance which covers issues including fairness, objectivity and unconscious bias.
- It is the role of panel members to agree final scores for each proposal. Panel members will be 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 will be read out at the beginning of the commissioning panel meeting which sets the tone for discussions and requires that panel members pay close attention to the scoring criteria and definitions.

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>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Je-S does not currently comply with disability accessibility schemes.</p> <p>Applicants should seek support from their own institution’s research support office.</p> <p>Panel meeting attendees/peer reviewers with physical disabilities may have difficulties with using their computer facilities/hardware.</p> <p>Panel meeting attendees/peer reviewers with neuro-disabilities may experience difficulties with concentration and focus during panel assessments.</p> <p>Panel meeting attendees/interviewers may experience access difficulties if any of the assessment stages are held in person at a venue.</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Je-S helpdesk is available to potential applicants if they need any assistance. Solicit information from panel meeting participants (in confidence) about any additional requirements they may have to fully participate.</p> <p>Ensure that virtual meeting offers an accessible and inclusive environment for participants. Depending on the needs identified, considerations might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As the meeting is taking place in an online platform, then closed captions will be used for the hearing impaired</li> <li>• Provision of documents in sans-serif, dyslexia-friendly fonts; and dyslexia-friendly formats;</li> <li>• Avoiding colours, lighting etc that may trigger migraines, epilepsy;</li> <li>• Ensuring that plenty of breaks are built into the agenda;</li> </ul> <p>If holding any stage of the assessment process in person, ensure there is a hybrid option available for those that may need it, choose accessible venues, and give information about</p>

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)
			venues with plenty of advance notice.
Gender reassignment	Potential negative	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Trans people may be absent from work as a consequence of transition and UKRI records may show the wrong gender. Risk of bias against a panel member of applicant.</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. We will work to ensure the use of gender neutral language in our documents. UKRI terms and conditions are flexible in nature and allow for absence as a result of medical treatment. We would expect that absence related to transition would be covered by the Research Organisation's absence policy and strongly encourage ROs to treat absence relating to transition like any other medical absence. Panel members will receive guidance on fair and objective assessment. Panel members and ESRC staff will safeguard the integrity of the assessment process by watching for bias and raising any concerns. Clear guidelines on reporting bullying and harassment will be provided. Consideration needs to be given at UKRI level as to how records (including Gateway to Research and other communications</p>

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)
			materials) might be adjusted.
<b>Marriage or civil partnership</b>	None identified	Applicants are not asked to disclose their marital status.	
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	<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>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.</p> <p>However, childcare costs associated with normal working patterns may not be sought.</p> <p>In the case that panel meetings are in person, facilities and breaks for breastfeeding/expressing should be made available if needed.</p> <p>Timetable of key dates will be made available to applicants and panellists in advance, as early as possible.</p>

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)
			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).
<b>Race</b>	Potential negative	<p>See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>There may be potential for bias or discrimination on the part of panel members where applicant ethnicity is known to the panel. This risk should also be considered where there are international participants. Individuals for whom English is their second language could be negatively impacted</p>	<p>See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations (particularly in relation to panel composition and mitigations against unconscious bias). Panel members and ESRC staff will safeguard the integrity of the assessment process by watching for bias and raising any concerns. Clear guidelines on reporting bullying and harassment will be provided.</p>
<b>Religion or belief</b>	Potential negative	<p>See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Key dates (call opening and closing dates and panel dates) coinciding with specific religious</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations (particularly in relation to panel composition and mitigations against unconscious bias)</p>

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)
		<p>festivals/events could disadvantage specific religious groups</p> <p>There could be potential bias and discrimination because it is known that somebody (either a panel member, a research applicant or research participants) has a particular faith or belief.</p> <p>If the event is all day this may discourage those from religions which require them to pray throughout day to attend.</p>	<p>Ensure that religious observances are considered when planning panel meetings. Considerations might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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);</li> <li>• Not scheduling meetings such that they would require travel late on Friday evenings (Jewish Sabbath) or on Fridays (Friday prayer, Islam)</li> <li>• Allowing prayer breaks if requested and provision of a prayer room if a panel meeting is held in person</li> </ul>

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)
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Potential negative, although few opportunities for participants to disclose their sexual orientation.	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>There may be potential for bias, bullying or harassment if the sexual orientation of an applicant or panel member is known or assumed.</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations (particularly in relation to managing bias). Applicants are not asked to disclose their sexual orientation</p>
<b>Sex (gender)</b>	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</p> <p>Offer hybrid option for in person meetings so those with caring responsibilities can minimise time working. ESRC can provide support to those with caring responsibilities to facilitate their attendance.</p>
<b>Age</b>	Potential negative or positive depending on scheme eligibility requirements	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>Track record is not an explicit criterion, given likely relationship to</p>

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)
		<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 is always the case. This is why this point has been included under 'age').</p>	<p>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>

Note: Excessive use of repeated line breaks can make a document inaccessible for users of assistive technologies. To ensure inclusion, please ensure a new table row is inserted for each point if there is more than one consideration or impact for each group (please ensure you populate the "protected characteristic group" column e.g. "disability continued"); rather than using the same row for multiple points with repeated line breaks to separate points.

### Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the proposed policy or activity or change in policy or activity could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	Yes. A variety potential negative impacts have been identified and considered as part of the call design. Reasonable adjustments will be made and by adhering to ESRC policies and procedures the risks have been/will be mitigated as far as possible 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 <b>proceed</b> .		
2. You can decide to <b>stop</b> the policy or practice at some point because the		

Question	Explanation / justification	
data shows bias towards one or more groups		
3. You can <b>adapt or change</b> 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 <b>proceed with caution</b> with this policy or practice knowing that it may favour some people less than others, providing justification for this decision.		

<b>Will this EIA be published*</b> *EIAs should be published alongside relevant funding activities e.g. calls and events.	Yes
<b>Date completed:</b>	18 January 2023
<b>End date of activity:</b> (if applicable)	October 2024
<b>Review date</b> (if applicable):	

**Annex 1: Examples of recently completed EIA templates**

<b>Council</b>	<b>Activity</b>
EPSRC	<a href="#">Inclusion Matters Call</a>
EPSRC	<a href="#">New Investigator Awards</a>
EPSRC	<a href="#">Policy change: Limit to the number of applications at a standard panel</a>
BBSRC	<a href="#">BBSRC Future Leader Fellowships (FLF) Scheme</a>
BBSRC	<a href="#">BBSRC/STFC/Innovate UK Biofilms programme</a>