Equality Impact Assessment – Network Plus

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 Network Plus includes our:

•   Grant terms and conditions, including recognition for sick leave and all forms of parental leave

•   EDI in Panel Meetings Guidance for all panel members.

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
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/format and arrangements to accommodate needs

c. Broad ranging panel membership
d. Meeting management/Chair/robust assessment criteria

	Question	Response
1.	**Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed**	Network Plus: • ESRC Policy Talent Accelerator Network Plus • Resilient UK coastal communities and seas Network Plus • Dementia Network Plus • Polarities and Regions Network Plus • Behavioural Science for Security and Defence Network Plus • Modelling UK supply chains as complex systems for resilience Network Plus
2.	**Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event**	A Network Plus is a strategic investment that brings together new or disparate communities from across the research and development system to identify, prioritise and develop emerging research and knowledge exchange challenges. It provides leadership across disciplines and sectors, continues to expand its connections and relationships throughout the duration of its funding, and tailors its activities to the needs in its area. A Network Plus is expected to establish and maintain appropriate links with relevant activities and research users to achieve its aims of increasing collaborative working across disciplines and sectors, providing visibility and accessibility, and connecting the research and innovation landscape. The Network Pluses will: • engage and network with other UKRI activities, and stakeholders in academia, industry, government and third sector (as applicable) in the UK and internationally, connecting and coordinating across a diverse range of disciplines and backgrounds • assess and determine what the UK needs in terms of research, research infrastructure and skills to develop capability in the relevant area • provide thought leadership and a clear vision in the relevant area • develop and run open funding opportunities for small projects or activities. Funding decisions will be based on several criteria including: Vision; Approach; Flexible Fund;

	Applicant and team capability to deliver; Resources and cost justification.
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? *(e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)*	**Behavioural Science for Security and Defence Network Plus** This opportunity was developed through consultations with UKRI Councils and advisors and with stakeholders in Government Departments, and National Security Agencies. **Dementia Network Plus** • Scoping activity with Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) • GAP analysis of ESRC dementia portfolio • Discussions with Alzheimer's Society and input from the Patient and Public Involvement lead **ESRC Policy Talent Accelerator Network Plus** Research organisation survey disseminated through ESRC IAAs and the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) Stakeholder engagement with representatives from across government, providers of P2R and research organisations. **Modelling UK supply chains as complex systems for resilience Network Plus** Consultation was held with the UKRI 'Building a Secure and Resilient World' cross council group and external advisory group. **Polarities and Regions Network Plus** • Scoping activities in consultation with UKRI councils (particularly AHRC as lead on UKRI BSRW strategic theme) and ESRC's SRR advisory group (which includes representation from ESRC Council, SAN and FCDO). **Resilient UK coastal communities and seas Network Plus** • Half day workshop activity with academic representatives across multiple disciplines, to identify key challenges in coastal community and natural environment research. • Discussions on scoping with representatives from relevant policy and nature departments across the UK. • Scoping activities in consultation with UKRI councils and advisory groups.
4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?	Internal and external stakeholders involved in the consultation process UK HEIs

	• Administrative staff • Knowledge Exchange professionals • Executive level • Academics (applicants) • Assessors • Existing UKRI investments Also: • Non-academic Project Co-Leads • International Project Co-Leads Third parties with interest in UK research in the areas covered by each Network Commissioning Panel Members for the Network Plus call UKRI staff attending the Panel meetings or other related events (webinars/ town halls etc) for Network Plus Government departments; researchers and stakeholders in government, business and civil society.
5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?	• UKRI staff (project officers) to review plans for managing flexible funding process including EDI considerations by the grant holder after award commences • Evaluation agreed as part of the commissioning process **Resilient UK coastal communities and seas Network Plus** • Progress will be monitored through regular reporting to the Programme Executive Board

GENERAL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

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

Eligibility and criteria
- The Network Plus opportunity 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.
- Include if appropriate:
  [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 may 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:
- 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 panel members are appointed, first and foremost, based on expertise, we will aim to appoint a diverse panel membership. Final decisions take into account trying to balance the panels by gender and geography and seek to ensure a diversity of 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 selecting and appointing panel members.
- The Dementia Network Plus has a particular emphasis on including People with Lived Experience and therefore a separate pre-panel will be arranged to include representatives of People Living with Dementia and carers. We will aim to appoint a diverse panel membership. Comments from the pre-panel will be fed back to the main panel members.
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Process
- The UKRI Peer Review Colleges should be the first source of peer reviewers consulted by UKRI staff. Where it is not possible to secure the necessary peer review from within the college membership, UKRI case officers will look beyond the college membership.
- 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 efforts are made to achieve an appropriately balanced membership in terms of gender, age, ethnic origin etc.
- Peer reviewers are required to evidence their views and scores. UKRI 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 will receive guidance which covers issues including fairness, objectivity and safeguarding the peer review process.
- 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 will be briefed on safeguarding the peer review process 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.

Network Plus Flexible Funding
- Grant Holders will be expected to adhere to EDI considerations and key principles as set out in the [UKRI guidance for equality, diversity and inclusion](#) so as to not disadvantage individuals on the basis of protected characteristics when awarding flexible funds.
- Grant Holders should ensure the flexible funding process encourages submissions from applicants of all backgrounds and abilities. Grant holders are encouraged to be flexible with scheduling and in implementing any reasonable adjustment requests for their own internal competitions and processes.

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	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Panel meeting attendees with neuro-disabilities may experience difficulties with concentration and focus during panel assessments. UK employment law requires employees	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. A timeline will be provided of key milestones, allowing early engagement with UKRI on specific mitigations. UKRI will endeavour to accommodate adjustments where possible. UKRI scheme guidance and communications to be checked using the new [UKRI content guide](#) to

| | | to serve a minimum term before eligibility for paid sick leave. This could impact on disabled researchers and innovators who may experience more sickness.

Additional care requirements could occur if individuals are required to:
• Participate in events on what would normally be a non-working day.
• Work extended hours on a normal working day.
• Attend meetings with overnight stays and/or travel overseas. | encourage accessibility in language.

Solicit information from panel meeting participants (in confidence) about any additional requirements they may have in order to fully participate.

Ensure that virtual Panel meeting offers an accessible and inclusive environment for participants. Depending on the needs identified, considerations might include:
• As the meeting is taking place in an online platform, then closed captions will be used for the hearing impaired
• 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.
• Allow carers to attend the meeting to support the panel member as required

UKRI will reimburse for any additional net sick leave costs that cannot be met within the announced Grant cash limit for staff within the Directly Incurred and Exceptions fund headings, except where these costs have already been recovered by claiming Statutory Sick Pay from HMRC. This will be payable only for the percentage of |

			time that the staff are contracted on the Grant. Grant Holders should ensure the flexible funding process encourages submissions from applicants of all backgrounds and abilities. They are encouraged to be flexible with scheduling and in implementing any reasonable adjustment requests.
Gender reassignment	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Individuals may be absent from work as a consequence of gender reassignment and UKRI records may show the wrong gender.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. UKRI scheme guidance and communications to be checked using the new UKRI content guide to encourage gender neutrality in language. 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 medical leave policy and strongly encourage ROs to treat absence relating to transition like any other medical leave absence. Consideration to be given at UKRI level as to how records (including Gateway to Research and other communications materials) might be adjusted. Panel members will be encouraged to include their pronouns in their Zoom name to avoid misgendering.
Marriage or civil partnership	Probably not	This is unlikely to have any effect on the inclusion of those who are	

		married or in civil partnerships.	
Pregnancy and maternity	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Provision for parental leave (including maternity leave, paternity leave and leave related to surrogacy and adoption) are covered in the UKRI terms and conditions. The 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. Providing meeting breaks that support breastfeeding / expressing mothers. Reimbursement of additional childcare costs will be considered by UKRI on a case-by-case basis, if the meeting participant is otherwise unable to attend. Grant holders should enable flexibility in the take up of project funds from the flexible funding pot e.g., start dates, duration, breaks for parental leave.
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 mitigations to safeguard the peer review process)

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 to safeguard the peer review process) Ensure that religious observances are taken into account when planning the panel meeting: - Scheduling meetings to avoid major religious festivals - Allowing prayer breaks if requested
Sexual orientation	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. International travel is permitted within the scheme and laws / attitudes related to sexual orientation may differ.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. The Grant Holder will have a responsibility to ensure the safety of their staff when travelling overseas.
Sex	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Use of language can present a barrier to participation and it may be perceived that those with caring responsibilities are disadvantaged. Panel members may be disadvantaged and unable to attend meetings if they have caring responsibilities	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. UKRI scheme guidance and communications to be checked using the new UKRI content guide to encourage gender neutrality in language. The call opening period has been elongated to avoid a closing date over the summer period when applicants might have childcare responsibilities. Ensure that the panel has balanced gender representation (aim for minimum 60:40 split)

			Reimbursement of additional childcare costs will be considered by UKRI on a case-by-case basis, if the meeting participant is otherwise unable to attend.
Age	Potential negative or positive depending on scheme eligibility requirements	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Early career researchers* may be disadvantaged as they don't have the same track record to draw on as an experienced researcher. (*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').	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Track record is not an explicit criterion. 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 the applicant and the team's capability to deliver the proposed Network Plus, using the relevant assessment criterion and scoring definition. Use of a variety of different communication strategies including social media to ensure that our messages reach the widest possible target audience.
Other characteristics not protected under the Equality Act	Potential negative. ESRC is committed to go above and beyond 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 disadvantaged by geography,		ROs need to be clear of their duty of care. The Research Organisation is responsible for compliance with the terms of the Equality Act 2010 including any subsequent amendments introduced while work is in progress; and for ensuring that the expectations set out in the guidance for equality, diversity and inclusion are met. Call specifications will draw attention to UKRI's aspirations around ED&I. 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.
institutional status etc.			**Dementia Network Plus** People with Lived Experience and carers will be involved in a number of aspects of the Dementia Network Plus. We will ensure reasonable adjustments are made as required. The examples and actions outlined in the Disability section above apply to People with Lived Experience.

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:	05 June 2023
Review date (if applicable):	