

Equality Impact Assessment – ESRC: UKRI Creating Opportunities Trial Accelerator Fund

This document provides guidance when completing an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA template can be found at the end of this document.

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 safe-guard 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’.¹

Evaluation Decision

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.

¹ http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/s/n/Acas_managers_guide_to_equality_assessments.pdf

Please send completed EIAs to EDI@esrc.ukri.org

Question	Response
1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed	ESRC: UKRI Creating Opportunities Trial Accelerator Fund
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event	<p>Funding will be provided to test and rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at spreading opportunities and reducing disparities in economic, health and social outcomes for people and places across the UK.</p> <p>The programme objectives are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ generate causal evidence on what works to spread opportunities and reduce spatial disparities in outcomes for people and places across the UK ▪ accelerate the development of innovative and ethical methods for robustly testing and evaluating the impact of interventions related to the thematic areas outlined ▪ build the capacity of the research and innovation system to forge interdisciplinary collaborations and lasting partnerships with local communities (including those with lived experience) in designing and delivering robust research trials and related evaluation activity ▪ provide actionable evidence that responds to the needs of decision makers and informs policy or practice at a local, regional, national or international scale <p>This fund will support projects lasting between 13 and 48 months. The full economic cost of projects can be between £1 and £2.5 million. ESRC will fund 80% of the full economic cost. ESRC will invest a total of £12 million</p>
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)	The development of this call involved a rigorous consulting process with a large number of stakeholders within UKRI, government, the research communities and other funders.
4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?	Applicants to the Trial Accelerator Fund

Question	Response
	<p>Commissioning peer reviewers and panel members for the Trial Accelerator Fund</p> <p>UKRI staff, including ESRC employees carrying out the commissioning of the call, and staff members across other councils who will provide input throughout the process</p>
<p>5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?</p>	<p>Applications will be assessed by a peer review stage consisting of academics as well as an assessment panel consisting of both academics and research users.</p> <p>Monitoring will be an iterative process throughout the lifetime of the grants however they will need to demonstrate clear, measurable, and achievable outcomes that demonstrate evidence of the research's planned impact, and which go beyond a list of outputs. There will need to be evidence of well thought-through and realistic plans for engagement and knowledge-exchange, that maximise opportunities for academic, societal, economic and user impact.</p>

GENERAL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

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

Eligibility and criteria

- This is a UKRI wide funding opportunity
- The principal investigator for this funding opportunity must be best at an organisation eligible for UKRI funding for the duration of the grant

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 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.
- Panel members will be briefed on bias and encouraged to feel empowered to constructively challenge potential bias where they identify it. The Panel Chair 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.

Process:

- The ESRC Peer Review College should be the first source of peer reviewers consulted by ESRC staff. 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. 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. 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 will receive guidance 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 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>The Funding Service is partially compliant with Web Accessibility Guidelines.</p> <p>Applicants should seek support from 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>The TFS site has been designed in order that the applicant can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • change colours, contrast levels and fonts • zoom in up to 300% without the text spilling off the screen • navigate most of the service using just a keyboard • navigate most of the service using speech recognition software • listen to most of the service using a screen reader (including the most recent versions of JAWS, NVDA and VoiceOver) <p>However:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some page elements are not accessible to all users • some tables do not have row headings • some page titles are not unique or suitable descriptive <p>The call specification has minimal use of colours and lighting that may trigger migraines and epilepsy. Call documents are in dyslexia-friendly fonts.</p> <p>Solicit information from panel meeting participants (in confidence) about any additional requirements they may have in order to fully participate.</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>Panel meeting attendees with neuro-disabilities may experience difficulties with concentration and focus during panel assessments</p>	<p>Ensure that the panel meeting offer an accessible and inclusive environment for participants. Depending on the needs identified, considerations might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable measures in place for the hearing impaired and we will make sure the transcript option is available; • Alternative document formatting and potential use of screen readers for the visually impaired. We will send power point slides ahead of time and make sure that images are described for use with text to talk, as well as making use of colours that are easier to read; • Provision of documents in 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 that any in person meetings are held in sufficiently bright and spacious rooms • Ensure that venues for any in person meetings are easily accessible to main transport links. • Consider (on a case-by-case basis) paying T&S for carers or support workers to attend alongside the participant, where this is required and not covered by the Individual's own employment contract. • Where there are particular constraints consider opportunities for participants to engage in a different way (via video-link, Zoom or tele-conference for instance).
Gender reassignment	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. If held in person, the considerations for gender neutral facilities such as bathrooms will be made when booking a venue for panel.

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>Trans people may be absent from work as a consequence of transition</p> <p>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	None identified	Applicant eligibility is not based on marital status.	N/A
Pregnancy and maternity	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>We shall ensure the use of gender-neutral language – parental leave.</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. (See RCUK fEC FAQs)</p> <p>If the Panel meeting is taking place via Zoom, breaks will be provided to provide opportunity for feeding children if necessary. This could include expressing/breastfeeding. If the meeting is in person consider whether the</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>venue for the commissioning panel meeting is able to provide facilities for breastfeeding/expressing mothers if necessary.</p> <p>If the Panel meeting is taking place in person reimbursement of additional childcare costs (on a case-by-case basis) 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)</p>
Race	Potential negative	There could be potential bias or discrimination because somebody (either a panel member, a research applicant or research participants) is from a particular ethnic background.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations (particularly in relation to panel composition and mitigations against bias and harassment).
Religion or belief	Potential negative	<p>See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations (particularly in relation to panel composition and mitigations against unconscious bias)</p> <p>Ensure that religious observances are taken into account when planning panel meetings. Considerations might include:</p> <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 Muslim's meals during periods of fasting); • (In person panel meeting) Accommodating dietary restrictions (ensuring that there is sufficient choice to allow all participants to eat – recognising that some groups cannot eat pork or beef or shellfish, that

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>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"> • (In person panel meeting) Not scheduling meetings such that they would require travel late on Friday evenings (for example Jewish Sabbath) or on Fridays (i.e. Friday prayer, Islam) • Allowing prayer breaks , with a dedicated space for this purpose at the venue 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 at least 60:40 split)</p> <p>If the panel meeting is in person, ensure that the meeting location is suitable to allow easy return home</p> <p>Encourage successful ROs to adopt gender neutral language in all relevant documentation.</p>
Age	Potential negative	<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</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.</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>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>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>

Additional non-protected characteristics for consideration?

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, some potential barriers have been identified (see above) however the necessary steps have been taken to mitigate the likelihood of this in the areas covered.	
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		

Question	Explanation / justification	
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* *EIAs should be published alongside relevant funding activities e.g. calls and events.	Yes
Date completed:	
End date of activity: (if applicable)	
Review date (if applicable):	

