



EPSRC - Equality Impact Assessment

Question	Response
1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed	EPSRC Responsive Mode: New Investigator Award
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event	To process and assess grants for EPSRC Responsive Mode funding
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPSRC’s Business Improvement team • The EPSRC cross-office advisory group XBIRT • Panel members through the panel member feedback questionnaires • The Simpler and Better Funding programme team
4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants to EPSRC • Peer Review College Members and reviewers • Panel members • EPSRC staff who are managing the peer review process.
5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback given on The Funding Service transition via the Simpler and Better Funding helpdesk (support@funding-service.ukri.org). • Feedback given via the panel member questionnaire. • Reviewer response rates and proportion of usable reviews. • The monitoring of application and award rates across all demographic groups. • Feedback gathered about The Funding Service transition through user testing, pilots and roll-out over 2023. • The SBF programme’s monitoring and evaluation of the programme’s success against a defined baseline. This includes the impact on the volume of applicant

	<p>enquiries, applications and the time taken to process them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue with senior leaders and research support staff through our strategic partner university relationships.
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As a funder of research, EPSRC remains committed to attracting the best potential researchers from a diverse population into research careers. For policy changes, funding activities and events EPSRC 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.
- 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.
- Support and encourage panel members to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions. Staff will work closely with the Panel Chair(s) 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 endeavor to achieve the minimum 30% for the underrepresented gender on the panel.
- Abide by the principles of peer review
- Provide EPSRC staff with tailored unconscious bias training for Peer Review processes and clear guidance for assessors.
- Handle personal sensitive information in compliance with General Data Protection
- Regulation 2018.

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	Potentially negative	<p>Some features of EPSRC's responsive mode opportunities are likely to change before each new round on The Funding Service to accommodate system developments.¹ These changes may be more challenging for neurodiverse applicants, research support staff, reviewers and panel members to implement due to the move from always open Opportunities to round-based calls with inflexible deadlines.</p> <p>Those that have or are perceived to have a disability face discrimination in society in general and are under-represented in EPSRC's portfolio, an assessment process may increase the risk of bias for this group.</p>	<p>We will publish clear announcements for each Responsive Mode round with instructions specifying how to apply on The Funding Service. Any workarounds will be specified in these announcements and the deadlines for each round will also be clearly specified. EPSRC will published a pre-announcement on 30 March 2023 with information about assessment criteria and application questions to allow applicants to prepare in advance of the round opening. The full announcement will be published on the opening date of the round. Applicants will see the full information about a round at least eight weeks before its closing date.</p> <p>All communications about rounds will be published in line with UKRI's accessibility standards so that as many people as possible can use and understand guidance for applicants, reviewers and panel members.</p> <p>Under the equality act 2010, employers are expected to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants and employees. This might include having a scribe to help write the application or using specialist software to support the writing of an application. Applicants are encouraged to speak to their research support services about the support available to them. EPSRC can also make reasonable adjustments for applicants, for example giving more time for a PI response under these circumstances. Applicants, reviewers and panel members are encouraged to speak to EPSRC staff to see if accommodations can be made to enable them to participate</p>

			<p>in the application and peer review processes.</p> <p>Information about how to apply to our funding Opportunities will be clearly signposted and explained on the Funding Finder under 'How to Apply' for each individual opportunity. Guidance will also be embedded into The Funding Service's digital application form.</p> <p>EPSRC's panel members receive a briefing on unconscious bias in advance of the panel. EPSRC panel convenors will remain vigilant to, and address, any bias during the assessment process, both at postal peer review and panel stage. Reviewers who are part of the peer review college also receive information about unconscious bias as part of their training.</p> <p>Applicants are also encouraged to raise any issues with reviews in advance of the panel so that they can be addressed.</p> <p>More information about EPSRC's commitment to ensuring fairness in peer review can be found here. EPSRC have recently published a 3 year EDI action plan which includes actions related to peer review to reduce the likelihood of bias impacting on decision making.</p>
Gender reassignment	Potentially negative	<p>Questions related to protected characteristics in The Funding Service will be in line with ONS guidance.²</p> <p>Those that have had or are undergoing gender reassignment face discrimination in society in</p>	<p>EPSRC's panel members receive a briefing on unconscious bias in advance of the panel. EPSRC panel convenors will remain vigilant to, and address, any bias during the assessment process, both at postal peer review and panel stage. Reviewers who are part of the peer review college also receive</p>

¹ Read about UKRI's Simpler and Better Funding Programme, which is developing The Funding Service, here: <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/improving-your-funding-experience/our-pathway-for-change/>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/measuringequality>

		<p>general. An assessment process may increase the risk of bias for this group.</p> <p>If an applicant's gender reassignment became known to the panel or reviewers, there is the potential for unconscious bias, but in no point during the assessment process is this disclosed to reviewers or panel members.</p>	<p>information about unconscious bias as part of their training.</p> <p>Applicants are also encouraged to raise any issues with reviews in advance of the panel so that they can be addressed.</p> <p>More information about EPSRC's commitment to ensuring fairness in peer review can be found here. EPSRC have recently published a 3 year EDI action plan which includes actions related to peer review to reduce the likelihood of bias impacting on decision making.</p>
Marriage or civil partnership	Potentially negative.	<p>At no point in the application process will applicants be required to declare their marital or civil partnership status. Reviewers and panel members would only be required to declare their marital or civil partnership status if it creates a conflict of interest in the assessment process, in line with UKRI's Conflict of Interest Policy.</p> <p>If an applicant's marital status became known to the panel or reviewers, there is the potential for unconscious bias, but in no point during the assessment process is this disclosed to reviewers or panel members.</p>	<p>EPSRC's panel members receive a briefing on unconscious bias in advance of the panel. EPSRC panel convenors will remain vigilant to, and address, any bias during the assessment process, both at postal peer review and panel stage. Reviewers who are part of the peer review college also receive information about unconscious bias as part of their training. Applicants are encouraged to raise any issues with reviews in advance of the panel so that they can be addressed.</p>
Pregnancy and maternity	Potentially negative	<p>Responsive mode rounds will run consecutively, meaning that those on parental leave will not be disadvantaged due to this change, because they will be able to continue to apply at a time that is convenient. However, due to the introduction of deadlines for responsive mode rounds, there is less flexibility around key dates in the assessment process.</p>	<p>As a mitigation, under exceptional circumstances, we will be able to move a proposal to be assessed at a later date if the application process is affected by leave related to pregnancy or maternity or other EDI reasons. If exceptional circumstances mean that applicants cannot meet a deadline for a PI response, there will be a workaround in place to allow flexibility with deadlines at the request of the applicant.</p>

		<p>If an applicant’s pregnancy or maternity leave status became known to the panel or reviewers, there is the potential for unconscious bias, but in no point during the assessment process is this disclosed to reviewers or panel members.</p>	<p>Applicants are encouraged to raise any issues with reviews in advance of the panel so that they can be addressed.</p> <p>If individuals receive a funding decision during their maternity leave period and are on leave for the start date of the grant, they can, as per UKRI’s Grant Terms and Conditions RGC 6.1 extend the grant period by up to 12 months without additional funding subject to our prior written approval.³</p>
Race	Potentially negative.	<p>Questions related to protected characteristics in The Funding Service will be in line with ONS guidance.</p> <p>Those that are racialised other than white, face discrimination in society in general and are under-represented in EPSRC’s portfolio. An assessment process may increase the risk of bias for this group.⁴</p> <p>If an applicant’s race or ethnicity became known to the panel or reviewers, there is the potential for unconscious bias, but in no point during the assessment process is this disclosed to reviewers or panel members.</p>	<p>EPSRC’s panel members receive a briefing on unconscious bias in advance of the panel. EPSRC panel convenors will remain vigilant to, and address, any bias during the assessment process, both at postal peer review and panel stage. Reviewers who are part of the peer review college also receive information about unconscious bias as part of their training.</p> <p>Applicants are encouraged to raise any issues with reviews in advance of the panel so that they can be addressed.</p> <p>More information about EPSRC’s commitment to ensuring fairness in peer review can be found here. EPSRC have recently published a 3 year EDI action plan which includes actions related to peer review to reduce the likelihood of bias impacting on decision making.</p>
Religion or belief	Potentially negative	<p>If key dates in the assessment process (e.g. opening and closing dates for rounds, panel dates and PI response deadlines) coincide with major religious festivals, then this could disadvantage applicants.</p>	<p>We will ensure that major deadlines like opening and closing dates for rounds and panel dates do not coincide with major religious festivals and bank holidays.</p>

³ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/UKRI-021122-fECGrantTermsAndConditionsGuidance.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/epsrc/our-policies-and-standards/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/ethnicity-and-race-equality-in-our-portfolio/>

		<p>Those that observe religion/belief systems face discrimination in society in general, an assessment process may increase the risk of bias for this group.</p>	<p>EPSRC’s panel members receive a briefing on unconscious bias in advance of the panel. EPSRC panel convenors will remain vigilant to, and address, any bias during the assessment process, both at postal peer review and panel stage. Reviewers who are part of the peer review college also receive information about unconscious bias as part of their training.</p> <p>Applicants are encouraged to raise any issues with reviews in advance of the panel so that they can be addressed.</p> <p>More information about EPSRC’s commitment to ensuring fairness in peer review can be found here. EPSRC have recently published a 3 year EDI action plan which includes actions related to peer review to reduce the likelihood of bias impacting on decision making.</p>
<p>Sexual orientation</p>	<p>Potentially negative</p>	<p>Questions related to protected characteristics in The Funding Service will be in line with ONS guidance.</p> <p>Those who are LGBTQ+ face stigma and discrimination in society in general, an assessment process may increase the risk of bias for this group.</p> <p>If an applicant’s sexual orientation became known to the panel or reviewers, there is the potential for unconscious bias, but in no point during the assessment process is this disclosed to reviewers or panel members.</p>	<p>EPSRC’s panel members receive a briefing on unconscious bias in advance of the panel. EPSRC panel convenors will remain vigilant to, and address, any bias during the assessment process, both at postal peer review and panel stage. Reviewers who are part of the peer review college also receive information about unconscious bias as part of their training.</p> <p>Applicants are encouraged to raise any issues with reviews in advance of the panel so that they can be addressed.</p> <p>More information about EPSRC’s commitment to ensuring fairness in peer review can be found here. EPSRC have recently published a 3 year EDI action plan which includes actions related to peer review to reduce the likelihood of bias impacting on decision making.</p>

<p>Sex (gender)</p>	<p>Potentially negative</p>	<p>Questions related to protected characteristics in The Funding Service will be in line with ONS guidance.</p> <p>Women and individuals across the sex and gender spectrums who do not identify as cis men face stigma and discrimination in society on the basis of their sex or gender and are underrepresented in EPSRC’s portfolio. An assessment process may increase the risk of bias for this group.</p> <p>If an applicant’s sex became known to the panel or reviewers, there is the potential for unconscious bias, but in no point during the assessment process is this disclosed to reviewers or panel members.</p>	<p>EPSRC’s panel members receive a briefing on unconscious bias in advance of the panel. EPSRC panel convenors will remain vigilant to, and address, any bias during the assessment process, both at postal peer review and panel stage. Reviewers who are part of the peer review college also receive information about unconscious bias as part of their training.</p> <p>Applicants are encouraged to raise any issues with reviews in advance of the panel so that they can be addressed.</p> <p>More information about EPSRC’s commitment to ensuring fairness in peer review can be found here. EPSRC have recently published a 3 year EDI action plan which includes actions related to peer review to reduce the likelihood of bias impacting on decision making.</p>
<p>Age</p>	<p>Potentially negative</p>	<p>Questions related to protected characteristics in The Funding Service will be in line with ONS guidance.</p> <p>For a variety of reasons individuals can face stigma and discrimination in society and assessment processes for their relative youth, or their relative age and the perceived experience or energy associated with these assumptions.⁵ If an applicant’s age became known to the panel or reviewers, there is the potential for unconscious bias, but in no point during the assessment process is this disclosed to reviewers or panel members.</p>	<p>EPSRC’s panel members receive a briefing on unconscious bias in advance of the panel. EPSRC panel convenors will remain vigilant to, and address, any bias during the assessment process, both at postal peer review and panel stage. Reviewers who are part of the peer review college also receive information about unconscious bias as part of their training.</p> <p>Applicants are encouraged to raise any issues with reviews in advance of the panel so that they can be addressed.</p> <p>More information about EPSRC’s commitment to ensuring fairness in peer review can be found here. EPSRC have recently published a 3 year EDI action plan which includes actions related to peer review to</p>

⁵ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/age-discrimination>

		6	reduce the likelihood of bias impacting on decision making.
Additional aspects (not covered by a protected characteristic)	Potentially negative	The round based approach may disadvantage those at early career stage, as proposals will not be sent out to review until a round closes, so they may be delayed in starting their first major grant.	This is in line with other opportunities published by EPSRC, and New Investigators will have a clear timeline of when to expect a result. It is not anticipated that the decision making process will take longer than our current processes.

Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the new/proposed change in policy, funding activity or event could discriminate against or unfairly disadvantage people?	With mitigations in place, it is unlikely that the new funding opportunity for EPRC's Responsive Mode will discriminate against or unfairly disadvantage people.	
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/against one or more groups.		
3. You can adapt or change the policy in a way which you think will eliminate the bias.	X	We can provide adaptations to our processes if biases are identified during the application, review or panel stages. These may involve providing information in alternative formats, flexibility about deadlines for exceptional circumstances and offering additional support where necessary.
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:	14 th February 2023
Review date (if applicable):	3 rd April 2023

Change log

Name	Date	Version	Change
Hannah Lilley	<i>23 May 2023</i>	1	4 th April 2023
Hannah Lilley	<i>25 May 2023</i>	1	25 th May 2023

