

## Equality Impact Assessment – Cross Research Council Responsive Mode scheme (CRCRM)

Question	Response
<p><b>1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed</b></p>	<p><b>Cross Research Council Responsive Mode scheme (CRCRM)</b></p>
<p><b>2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event</b></p>	<p>UKRI's Corporate Plan published in 2022 includes a specific objective to pilot a fully open interdisciplinary responsive mode scheme to support 'bottom up' non-constrained ideas from the research community that is open across all 7 research council remit areas - the Cross Research Council Responsive Mode (CRCRM) scheme. This aims to support breakthrough interdisciplinary ideas that transcend, combine or significantly span disciplines. It will support ideas not routinely funded through existing UKRI responsive mode schemes, that are outside current disciplinary boundaries, that can only be addressed through interdisciplinary collaboration. Awards will be potentially transformative for the participating disciplines or lead to creation of new approaches to research questions and methodologies.</p> <p>This scheme adopts a novel approach to assessment by a college of interdisciplinary experts, moving away from traditional external written peer review which focusses on specific disciplines and can be less relevant to integrated, interdisciplinary research, which is the focus of this scheme.</p> <p>Awards will be made under standard UKRI terms and conditions of research grants and all UKRI's EDI policies and guidance apply.</p> <p><b>Key Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run two rounds of the scheme, each with an assessed outline stage and an invited full stage</li> <li>• Appointment and training of an Interdisciplinary Assessment College</li> <li>• Communications and engagement with research community</li> <li>• Evaluation of the scheme in real time</li> </ul>

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	<p><b>Key features</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £65m funding across two rounds</li> <li>• Project costs (fEC) between £200,000 and £1.2 million</li> <li>• UKRI will fund 80% fEC</li> <li>• Project duration, up to two years</li> <li>• ~36 awards expected to be made in each round.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>For more detail see:</b></li> </ul> <p><i>UKRI cross research council responsive mode pilot scheme: round 1</i></p> <p><i>UKRI cross research council responsive mode full stage pilot scheme: round 1</i></p> <p><i>UKRI cross research council responsive mode pilot scheme: round 2</i></p> <p><b>Applicants to the scheme</b></p> <p>Project Leads (PLs) and Project co-Leads must be based at an organisation eligible for UKRI research council funding; PLs can apply as individuals or as part of a consortium, based in a single institute or across a number of institutions.</p> <p>They must usually have a postgraduate degree or equivalent. They must be researchers based in the UK and employed by an eligible research organisation, with some exceptions. They must have a contract of employment at lecturer level or equivalent. Project partners and sub-contractors are allowed.</p> <p>International Project co-Leads are eligible to be members of the core team, provided that their organisations meet the international organisation eligibility requirements. Other grant roles are permitted to be part of the team, such as research associates, technicians and professional enabling staff. PhD students cannot be funded through this scheme.</p>

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	<p><b>Interdisciplinary Assessment College (IAC)</b>  For this pilot scheme, UKRI has appointed an Interdisciplinary Assessment College, members of which are trained in each stage of the assessment process. The scheme offers a unique opportunity to be part of an important new approach to funding interdisciplinary research.</p> <p>Applications to the college were open to everyone with experience of interdisciplinary research, from academic and non-academic backgrounds (including business, public and third sector organisations), and from across the diverse range of roles needed for successful research (including, for example, technicians and professional services). Applicants to the IAC could be early, mid and late career stages, and international applicants were welcomed.</p> <p>Members of the college are eligible to apply for funding through the UKRI Cross Research Council Responsive Mode pilot scheme.</p> <p>UKRI invited direct applications to the IAC from individuals in an open recruitment call. We received 1325 applications and appointed 314 college members comprising 71 in the chair/rover pool and 243 college members. The success rate of IAC applicants was 22.7%. The proportion of successful members who listed “Professional Services” experience within their application appointed to the college, was 20%.</p> <p>Numbers appointed were based on the number of College Members required to assess the anticipated number of applications, spread across the UKRI remit areas and the delivery team’s capability to train and manage the pool of members.</p> <p>A list of IAC members, with aggregate EDI data, can be found here: <a href="#">UKRI-160824-InterdisciplinaryAssessmentCollegeMembershipAugust2024.pdf</a></p> <p>For Round 2, a gap analysis is being conducted to ensure that the spread of expertise is appropriately aligned to the applications received at the outline stage.</p>
<p><b>3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this scheme? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)</b></p>	<p>This opportunity has been developed in response to a gap identified in the 2016 Nurse Review and the 2022 Grant Review for research that significantly spans remits of different research councils where there is no clear ‘home’ council.</p> <p><b>Consultation within UKRI</b>  The scheme is governed by a UKRI IRM Project Board and a Working Group. These collectively have representation from all Research Councils and UKRI teams including communications, evaluation and policy</p>

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	<p>teams, and is being developed in consultation with the central funding team and the Simpler and Better Funding programme team.</p> <p><b>Consultation beyond UKRI</b>  This opportunity was circulated via UKRI’s website, via Councils’ networks and social media routes. In addition, UKRI sent out direct communications to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA)</li> <li>• Research Organisation Consultation Group (ROCG)</li> <li>• Association of Independent and Technical ROs</li> <li>• Technicians’ Group</li> <li>• Future Leaders Fellowships circulation list</li> <li>• Praxis Auril – the professional body of knowledge exchange</li> </ul> <p>UKRI ran external webinars for applicants to the IAC and the funding opportunity.</p> <p><b>Consultation through Evaluation</b>  The scheme is being evaluated in real time and surveys will be sent out to applicants and IAC members at relevant points during the scheme’s implementation.</p> <p>Following each panel stage, Chairs and Rovers have the opportunity to provide feedback on the assessment processes via workshops conducted following the Round 1 assessment. The proposed amendments to the assessment process for Round 2 were shared with this group and further feedback was captured prior to Project Board making decisions of process updates for Round 2. Through the involvement of the IAC in this way, the community feels involved in the development of this pilot scheme and its novel approach to assessment of interdisciplinarity.</p> <p>The evaluation is governed by an internal Evaluation Working Group and an Evaluation Advisory Group; the latter includes representatives from UKRI, from Kings College, London and from the Canadian Tri-Agency, and this group of experts has been recruited in consultation with UKRI central evaluation team and IRM Project Board members.</p>
<p><b>4. Who is affected by the scheme?</b></p>	<p><b>Applicants to the scheme</b>  Researchers in the UK (i.e. those who have a lectureship position, or equivalent* with an eligible UK Research Organisation at the time of application) who can demonstrate that their interdisciplinary project involves disciplines</p>

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	<p>from more than 1 UKRI research council and explores new types of, and approaches to, interdisciplinary research not routinely funded through existing UKRI responsive mode schemes, can apply for funding. * By equivalent, we include applicants who are on a similar grade as lecturer but are on a research pathway at a university or are staff at a research institute.</p> <p>Their applications must also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• include a project team with expertise in the disciplines required for the delivery of the project</li> <li>• demonstrate the potential for reciprocal research benefits through the integration of distinct disciplinary perspectives and spheres of knowledge</li> <li>• demonstrate how potential challenges will be addressed in conducting interdisciplinary research and outlines how these will be overcome</li> <li>• show co-creation and design involving all disciplines required for successful delivery of the projects</li> </ul> <p>This programme is intended to meet a funding gap that is perceived to exist in UKRI's provision.</p> <p><b>Interdisciplinary Assessment College</b>  Applicants and appointees to the IAC – appointees are panel members, chairs and rovers who have been selected for their expertise in reviewing interdisciplinary proposals and who will be trained in the assessment of applications to this scheme. They will be responsible for assessing applications to the scheme and making recommendations to UKRI for funding.</p> <p><b>UKRI Staff</b>  UKRI Talent Team staff who are responsible for delivering the scheme  UKRI staff from each Research Council supporting the delivery of the scheme  UKRI staff from central teams, including policy, research and innovation culture, and communications  UKRI staff who are responsible for the governance of the scheme.</p> <p><b>External Staff</b>  Two members of the Evaluation Advisory Group are non-UKRI  One member of staff delivering the scheme is seconded from Leeds University  External contractors are involved in evaluation  External contractors are involved in training the IAC</p>

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<p><b>5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the scheme?</b></p>	<p><b>Monitoring</b> Monitoring and evaluation of the programme is happening in real time and will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous learning to inform improvements to the assessment process.</li> <li>• Evaluation of the wider scheme</li> </ul> <p>Plans for this have been developed with the UKRI Evaluation Team and comprise:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Internal UKRI process reporting based on surveys of stakeholder groups (applicants, IAC members, internal administrators)</li> <li>2. Mini projects by the Innovation Research Caucus to support the review of the process in supporting interdisciplinary research</li> <li>3. An independent evaluation of processes to understand the wider impact of the scheme (awarded to Technopolis Ltd.)</li> </ol> <p><b>Data collection</b> Diversity data has been collected on applications to the IAC and its appointed members and for applicants to the scheme via the UKRI Joint Electronic-Submission (Je-S) system for the round 1 outline stage applicants and via the UKRI Funding Service for the round 1 full stage and round 2.</p> <p>For this scheme we were able to collect Project Lead EDI data during that application process; for Project Co-Leads and other core team members, where EDI data has not been captured during the application process, this will be collected via a separate survey for awarded applicants.</p> <p>This data will contribute to the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the pilot scheme.</p> <p><b>Governance</b> The UKRI Interdisciplinary Responsive Mode Project Board is responsible for establishing, maintaining and ensuring there is effective governance, leadership and direction for the delivery of the CRCRM pilot scheme. This includes ensuring the scheme clearly adds value to the UK research and innovation landscape, operates well across diverse sectors, and is implemented effectively. It also includes overseeing the evaluation and monitoring of the scheme.</p>

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	The CRCRM Working Group is responsible for the efficient and effective set-up, delivery and evaluation of the pilot scheme, including ensuring the effective monitoring and evaluation of the programme and feeding key learnings into subsequent calls.

## GENERAL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

UKRI is committed to embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in all we do, so that we can maximise the impact of our research and innovation to involve and benefit all parts of society. Everything we fund must embrace a diversity of thought, people and ideas. Applicants are signposted to our EDI policies and provisions, to include guidance for those who have taken career breaks or need ‘reasonable adjustments’ to support them in the application process. The Resume for Research and Innovation (R4RI) has an optional additions section, where applicants may provide context, such as details for career breaks, alternative career paths, information about a disability or long-term health condition. The Cross Research Council Responsive Mode scheme adopts the standard [UKRI Terms and Conditions of Research Grants](#), and these are designed to support equality, diversity and inclusion in all that we do. UKRI collates [EDI data on grant applicants](#) and publishes this annually. UKRI’s Conflict of Interest policy sets out our expectations, alongside our commitment to the [Nolan Principles and our Code of Conduct](#).

Operationally we have particularly focussed on considering applicant and college members time commitments ensuring that, where possible, the preparation of applications, closing dates, assessment periods and all panel meetings take into consideration school holidays. Materials for applicants and assessors are provided online, and in accessible formats where required. Virtual settings for panel training and for panel meetings and locations and venues for post-award engagements are designed to be physically and neurologically accessible, with agendas considerate of EDI, and all engagements incorporate reasonable adjustments as required to support applicants, assessors and award holders.

In line with UKRI’s reasonable adjustments guidance, where an application includes costs for reasonable adjustment, UKRI will ensure they are eligible, and these should be accepted without comment’.

### **CRCRM Scheme-specific considerations of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

- Building on UKRI’s suite of underpinning EDI provisions set out above, the CRCRM scheme has been designed at each stage of development and delivery to implement our commitment to EDI.
- For Round 2, an extended timeline has been allowed and a published pre-announcement has further underpinned the open communication for the scheme. Flexibility is allowed on a case-by-case basis for circumstances such as parental leave and bereavement, whereby an application to Round One of the pilot scheme can be ‘paused’ and assessed during Round Two.

Further considerations specific to Applicant and Assessor groups are listed below.

### CRCRM Applicants to the Scheme

- Applicants may be the Project Lead (PL) on only 1 application but may be involved in other applications provided they have the capacity to meet these multiple commitments. Applications may include Project Co-Leads (PcLs) who will assist the PL in the management and leadership of the project and may deputise or take over the leadership if required. There may be a number of PcLs supporting the Project Lead.
- For Round 2, to avoid exceeding the assessment capacity of the IAC, UKRI are introducing institutional caps, based on submissions to the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF). Eligible organisations who did not submit to the REF are permitted to submit a maximum of 2 applications. Lead organisations must however provide a statement describing the inclusive process they used to identify and select the applications for submission. The statement should consider:
  - Scheme promotion and support for applicants
  - Application selection processes
  - Diversity in the selection of applications

By implementing this approach, the scheme is responding to anticipated demand based on Round 1 applications along with EDI challenges, as part of its commitment to continuous improvement.

- Application and award data of the CRCRM scheme will also be reviewed after each full round (Outline + Full stage) and consideration given to whether additional steps need to be taken to reach all eligible applicants across the breadth of the scheme. Application data is likely to vary between disciplines and care will be taken to also review these potential differences after each round and consider if additional steps need to be taken.
- Generalised panel feedback is shared with all applicants, and uploaded to the webpage, emphasising features of strong and weak applications, including the importance for disciplines engaging in project planning from the outset through an integrated approach, that overcomes potential communication barriers as a result of discipline-specific terminology, for example.



### CRCRM Assessors (applicants to the Interdisciplinary Assessment College (IAC) and appointed members)

There are known issues in the expert review process that can introduce bias and jeopardise fair decision-making. For example, unconscious bias relating to protected characteristics, non-traditional career pathways or geographical place can prevail, and this can be compounded by cognitive workload. We have aimed to address these from the outset and keep these under continuous review.

- Applicants to the IAC were required to demonstrate a proven ability to champion diversity and promote inclusive behaviours on panels, supporting a culture that respects and listens to a diversity of views in reaching a consensus.
- We have aimed to attract and appoint a diverse pool of members to the college, widely promoting the opportunity to underrepresented groups. In particular, we have aimed to attract groups currently underrepresented in our peer review processes considering the background population of UK-based researchers<sup>1</sup>. This includes women, minority ethnic researchers and people with disabilities.
- To increase the diversity of thinking college membership was also open to early career researchers, technicians and professional services staff who support researchers in interdisciplinary research.
- International IAC applicants were encouraged to apply; as panels run using on-line platforms, there will not be a requirement to travel. International College members were made aware they would be required to attend virtual panel meetings at UK times.
- Over 1300 applications to the IAC were received and final selection of membership (313) has a balance of diversity to reflect that seen across all applicants. For IAC applicants who were not selected but appointable, permission has been sought to maintain their application data for the duration of this pilot, to enable further balancing of skills and diversity if needed for Round 2.
- All IAC members involved in assessment are required to attend CRCRM training in assessing interdisciplinary applications, at outline stage and full stage, and at both Rounds 1 and 2. Panel members are supported and encouraged to follow good practice, including consideration of fairness, objectivity and awareness of unconscious bias, such as against protected characteristics, in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions.
- IAC members are appointed to panels with roles as Introducing Members (IMs) on applications. The diversity of the panel is also considered, taking into account geographical place (and type of organisation) and where possible EDI data to ensure that the panels bring a diversity of thought. Where possible, a professional services expert is included in each panel; with their experience of supporting interdisciplinary researchers this further enhances thought diversity beyond the single discipline.
- IAC panel members and chairs receive a briefing on unconscious bias in advance of the panel. Panel convenors will remain vigilant to, and address, any bias during the assessment process at panel stage.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on analysis of *HESA data 2021/22*

- To manage the volume of applications, multiple panels run concurrently and are observed by Roving Panel Members who help to ensure consistency and fairness. Panel chairs are supported by UKRI convenors who also play a role in ensuring consistency and taking measures to avoid bias.
- Third party evaluators are invited to observe training sessions and assessment panels. While they do not have an EDI brief specifically, an element of the evaluation approach involves identifying potential modifications to the funding call and assessment process that can increase the breadth and diversity of disciplinary participation.
- Panel members are appointed to panels with roles as Introducing Members (IMs) on applications, with a maximum number of applications allocated to each member to take account of cognitive load. Regular breaks during panels also alleviate cognitive load.
- Guided by panel chairs and supported by UKRI convenors, panel members use scoring criteria and definitions consistently to achieve a systematic, evidence-based approach to assessment.
- At the full stage, Project Leads are invited to respond to assessor feedback, and their responses are included in the final assessment.
- In round 1, once scoring and banding had been applied, a partial randomisation process was used to arrive at a final list of applications to award. Based on the sample size that this randomisation process was applied to, it is too early to draw conclusions relating to its effect on the diversity of ideas that were funded. UKRI commissioned the [Review of Peer Review](#) which highlights the evidence base for partial randomisation, and experiences from both rounds of the CRCRM pilot scheme, will contribute to the development of this evidence base.
- Following the communication of outline and full stage outcomes, [Generalised Feedback collated from panel discussions](#) is shared with all applicants to highlight strong features and areas for improvement.
- After full stage outcomes have been communicated, assessor feedback is issued directly to all full stage applicants.

**Note that this Equality Impact Assessment is a live document and will be subject to further iteration if needed as the scheme develops, to accommodate adaptations to eliminate bias and where features relating to incorporation of EDI considerations are further enhanced.**

**Evaluation of CRCRM impact on protected characteristics**

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 potential negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
<b>Disability (we include mental and physical disabilities)</b>	Possibly, negative	There are no impacts that are unique to CRCRM. General issues regarding UKRI's grant application systems and provisions for flexibility are addressed through policies designed to apply across our organisation.	<p>Make clearer in the scheme details that applicants with a disability (inclusive of physical and neurological) can cost for additional support required that is directly related to the grant</p> <p>Due to the duration of awards being limited to two years for this scheme, the timeframe will not be extended pro-rata to accommodate part-time working hours. If established beyond the pilot stage this may be reconsidered. If a PL or PcL on a funded project needs to change their FTE, there will be flexibility to do this; UKRI must be satisfied that team capability to deliver is maintained through any new arrangements made.</p>
<b>Gender reassignment</b>	Possibly, negative	There are no impacts that are unique to CRCRM. As per UKRI's policies we take care to adopt gender neutral language and protect applications personal details.	We will ensure to use gender neutral language in all call materials and engagement with the community.

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 potential negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
<b>Marriage or civil partnership</b>	Potentially, negative	There are no impacts that are unique to CRCRM. UKRI's policies protect applicant and panel members' personal data, and UKRI's Conflict of Interest policy safeguards against undue influence.	
<b>Pregnancy and maternity/paternity</b>	Possibly, negative (assume all parental leave irrespective of sexual orientation. Where the response refers to pregnancy, we include surrogacy and adoption as well).	There are no impacts that are unique to CRCRM. UKRI's policies allow for flexibility to include extension of deadlines and activation of grants.	
<b>Race, including ethnicity</b>	Possibly negative	<p>There are no impacts that are unique to CRCRM.</p> <p>Research shows that researchers from minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely than their counterparts to progress to a postdoctoral research career. The impediments at future career stages are not yet known but representation at the more senior levels of academia suggests that this attrition continues later on.</p>	<p>International Project Co-Leads are eligible for this scheme, provided their organisations meet the eligibility requirements; this aspect of the scheme design could positively affect ethnic diversity of the research team.</p> <p>For Round 2, a UKRI harmonised policy on International Project co-Lead eligibility is explained in scheme guidance.</p>
<b>Religion or belief</b>	Not enough information to fully assess but potentially, negative	<p>There are no impacts that are unique to CRCRM.</p> <p>As this is a pilot scheme with the need to be delivered at pace, it is</p>	Key application deadlines have been set with consideration for standard school holidays in mind.

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 potential negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
		possible that call and assessment timelines could fall over religious holidays with applicants and / or panellists requiring flexibility to fully participate.	The new UKRI Funding Service, contains an expanded set of questions asked of applicants, to include religion. Data processing will be in line with data protection practice and use will be subject to the new UKRI Funding Service Data Protection Impact Assessment.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Not enough information to assess		The new UKRI Funding Service, contains an expanded set of questions asked of applicants, to include sexual orientation. Data processing will be in line with data protection practice and use will be subject to the new UKRI Funding Service Data Protection Impact Assessment.
<b>Sex</b>	Possibly negative	The awards are open to all career stages but given the greater proportion of males at the mid and advanced career stages <sup>1</sup> this could result in an increased proportion of applications from male applicants to the scheme.	Applicants will be able to undertake grants flexibly (there are no restrictions on FTE% involvement of Project Lead or team members) within the 2-year timeframe, to combine with personal responsibilities, and with provisions in place to ensure parental leave in accordance with the terms and conditions of their employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on analysis of *HESA data* 2021/22

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 potential negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
		<p>Membership of the IAC is open to those from a range of backgrounds including technical backgrounds where there is typically a stronger gender imbalance, with physics, maths, engineering and computer science type disciplines being particularly male dominated.<sup>2</sup></p>	
<p><b>Age</b></p>	<p>Possible indirect impact</p>	<p>The awards are open to all career stages. For the CRCRM scheme we state that PLs usually have at least a postgraduate degree, although we expect most applicants to have a PhD or equivalent. They must have a contract of employment at lecturer level or equivalent. Applicants to the IAC can also be of any career stage. In both situations, anecdotal evidence suggests that ECRs specialise in a single discipline before embarking on interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinary researchers may apply later in life to this scheme and may meet a culture where</p>	<p>The scheme is open to applicants of all career stages.</p> <p>The Resume for Research and Innovation enables applicants to describe their track record, and additionally to describe any factors that provide context, such as retraining in IDR, and career breaks.</p>

<sup>2</sup> Based on data in Chapter 7 *The\_TALENT\_Commission\_report\_singles.pdf* ([mitalent.ac.uk](http://mitalent.ac.uk))

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 potential negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
		linear, single-discipline careers are developed quickly.	

**Evaluation:**

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the proposed policy or activity or change in policy or activity could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	As described 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 data shows bias towards one or more groups		
3. You can <b>adapt or change</b> the policy or activity in a way which you think will eliminate the bias	<b>X</b>	As 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* Yes/Not required</b> (*EIA's should be published alongside relevant funding activities e.g. calls and events:	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Date completed:</b>	<b>26 September 2024</b>
<b>Review date</b> (if applicable):	<b>After Round 2 of the pilot is completed, and in advance of further rounds which are to be confirmed.</b>



**Change log**

Name	Date	Version	Change