



# UK Research and Innovation Equality Impact Assessment Form

## About your activity

### Title of your activity

STFC Funding Opportunity

### Council or business area

STFC

## Aims and objectives

Provide a brief outline of your activity being considered and its rationale and aims.

STFC hosts many funding opportunities to support the UKs research in the areas of:

- particle physics
- astronomy
- particle astrophysics
- solar and planetary science
- nuclear physics
- accelerator science

STFC also runs funding opportunities that involve translating these research areas to industry and for public engagement purposes.

STFC, and its predecessor organisations, has been running funding opportunities for decades with processes and policies supporting this activity changing and adapting as has been required to address areas such as EDI. This high-level EIA covers the generic areas of the funding process which are common across the RC. Each opportunity will complete a more specific checklist to ensure that the consideration in this EIA have been addressed but wo also flag where there are specifics related to that opportunity.

Outline the aspects of your activity that need to be covered by the EIA.

STFC is dedicated to ensuring that the peer review process is open and inclusive. Those engaged in the process endeavour to conduct each stage in a fair manner, without prejudice or bias, In line with this we follow the Nolan Principles. Additionally, comments and suggestions received as part of the peer review survey are implemented where possible to improve the process.

The standard activities for running an opportunity in STFC are:

- advertising
  - application process,
  - external review
  - building a panel
  - hosting panel meetings/interviews
  - Post award management
- Any specific consideration for an individual opportunity will be included in the checklist

The following are the considerations/actions that we will take as standard

**Advertising:**

- The opportunity is advertised widely to reach the largest possible audience including publishing on the UKRI Funding Finder
- The UKRI website conforms to accessibility requirements for websites
- The opportunity will be advertised as soon as the key dates are known to allow applicants time to prepare ahead of the opening date, wherever possible

**Application process:**

- Guidance will be provided to make the process for application clear along with any specific details required for the opportunity. Assessment criteria will be clearly identified.
- STFC will make available hard copies of documents when required
- STFC will support applicants throughout the process, from pre-submission right through to informing them of the outcome.
- The UKRI Funding Service conforms to accessibility standards
- The opportunity will be open for a minimum of 8 weeks unless there are reasons outside of our control
- Opportunities will not close over weekends and we will endeavour to avoid closing dates soon after school holidays.

**External Review:**



- A wide range of reviewers are approached to support a diverse and inclusive range of people are invited to take part
- The questions and assessment criteria which applicants have been asked to address are clearly transparent to reviewers
- The UKRI Funding Service conforms to accessibility standards
- Our guidance clearly states our expectations of reviewers
- STFC will provide all reasonable support to our reviewers in order to ensure they understand the aims, objectives, and processes of the call
- STFC will discuss options for extending due dates where the reviewer would have difficulty in meeting that initially requested

#### **Building a panel:**

- STFC holds an annual membership exercise covering all of its standing panels which is covered by its own EIA.
- For ad hoc panels, or where we need to recruit outside of the exercise, best practice from the EIA is followed.
- STFC aim to achieve a gender balance which includes 30% of the under-represented group and will justify where this hasn't been possible.

#### **Hosting panel meetings/interviews:**

- Pre-meeting discussions take place, STFC staff will work closely with the Panel Chair to agree approaches that are designed to minimise opportunities for bias and improve transparency of the decision making process
- A presentation on Objective Decision making will be presented reminding panel members of the roles and responsibilities required of them and office staff and to highlight best practice.
- STFC will ensure that assessment criteria are clear and easily accessible throughout the process, including at the meeting.
- Everyone involved in the decision-making process, including STFC staff, are aware of Unconscious Bias and encouraged to undertake training.
- STFC endeavour to achieve the minimum 30% female participation on a panel and will justify in the checklist for the opportunity if this has not been achieved.
- STFC enable participation for people with alternative work patterns, including reduced working hours
- Panel members are asked to inform STFC if they have any additional needs to enable attendance or participation including the option to join remotely
- STFC will schedule appropriate breaks and provide refreshments for Panel members
- STFC will take all care to avoid dates which might not be suitable eg due to religious celebrations to support diverse representation
- Venue arrangements when required will be selected for ease of accessibility and will offer a full range of sensory accessibility relating to visual and hearing impairments.
- Catering will be arranged with clear labelling and be appropriate to those who have specific cultural, religious, health or disability needs



- STFC will reimburse additional caring costs, above any beyond that required during normal working hours.
- Where an applicant is due to attend a panel or interview as part of the assessment process, STFC will make all reasonable efforts to accommodate any requirements considering issues of accessibility, travel restrictions and alternative working patterns. The STFC team will request details of any such requirements when an applicant is invited for interview

### **Post award management:**

- STFC/UKRI terms and conditions allow for flexibility such as extensions to awards to support individual who might, for example, need to take a period of extended leave
- STFC/UKRI terms and conditions allow for additional funds to be sought at the end of an award to cover costs incurred above the grant award for parental leave and sickness.
- STFC/UKRI terms and conditional allow for costs of Visas and NHS surcharge where eligibility is met
- STFC/UKRI terms and conditions allow for a grant holder to change organisations, where agreement can be made, to support career moves or personal need to relocate.

Any other additional activities specific to an Opportunity will be included within the checklist.

## **Who is affected?**

Staff, applicants, panel members, awardees, wider external and internal stakeholders

## **What data and consultation have you used?**

Detail the evidence used and any consultation undertaken related to the equality impact of your activity. This could include (not an exhaustive list):

- There are many UKRI policies and processes in place to ensure that our decision making process is robust and objective so there is generally not a need to consult where the standard process is being applied.
- STFC panel members are asked to complete a survey after the peer review meeting which includes questions on bias and objective decision making. Any comments received (either positive or negative) can be used to amend a process to improve the robustness of our decision making.
- STFC is aware from both HESA data and UKRI data that there are areas of low diversity in parts of the community which we support. It is not easy to address this on a short-term basis but we strive to improve participation from applicants and panellists across characteristics.

Any other additional data or consultation specific to an opportunity will be included within the checklist



## Impact on specific groups

### Are there general impacts on multiple groups?

Although we will not share information on protected characteristics, in person meetings can inadvertently lead to stereotyping based on assumptions made regarding an individual's appearance etc. To help alleviate this, panel members are required to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions and are reminded of the conditions that may lead to unconscious bias during each meeting. STFC staff presence during panel meetings and interview acts as an additional assurance to ensure unbiased peer review.

To help enable inclusive participation in all elements of the process we will respond to specific requests from individuals wherever possible and encourage them to do so. General considerations that we will make are ensuring accessible venues, planning in regular breaks in meetings, allowing participation via Teams, thinking about the timing of closing dates and meetings to avoid times which would be unfavourable to certain groups of people for example during religious festivals or over school holidays. It may be that this is not always possible but STFC will work with individuals to try and find solutions to allow participation.

We do not always have data available to support whether there are unintended impacts, negative or positive, relating to all of the characteristics so do not have evidence of whether these are happening. Our general approach, as detailed in the paragraph above, is intended to minimise impacts and improve EDI in our funding processes. Ensuring that we try to remove barriers should hopefully improve the inclusivity of our funding process and lead to a more diverse pool of applicants and those involved in the review period which is beneficial to all. It is, however, recognised that there is a need to engage with under-represented groups from a much earlier age which is less in our control and limits the impact that we can have.

### Impact on protected characteristics

Complete the table for all characteristics. You only need to add details if there is a positive or negative impact.

Protected characteristic	Impact (positive, negative, none or unknown)	Details of impact	Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact



Age	Negative	<p>Panel members or reviewers may cite age in terms of lack of experience or in terms of near retirement which can bias discussions.</p> <p>UKRI diversity data for the FYs 2016/17 – 2023-2024 show very few applicants to STFC under the age of 29, with the exception of Fellowships.</p> <p>The strategic nature of STFC funding and the mechanisms used can be complex and potentially off-putting for less experienced applicants. Group/departmental level applications such as consolidated grants also mean that there is less likelihood of these researchers being recognised as the overall Project Lead.</p>	<p>See general impacts above.</p> <p>We also allow applicants who are retired to continue to lead projects where the host RO provides evidence that they agree to provide the required on-going support</p>
Disability	Negative	<p>The proportion of individuals applying for STFC funding that have disclosed a disability is small which makes success rates each year very variable. It's hard, therefore, to determine whether our process has an impact on disabled applicants.</p>	<p>There are a number of ways in which we support disabled individuals to be able to participate in meetings/interviews for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the use of video conferencing or equivalent tools, tailored timing of the meeting schedule, or provision of specific facilities to enable an applicant or panel member to be comfortable in the meeting environment.</li><li>• Electronic information is accessible and STFC will investigate the ability for the potential use of screen readers for personnel who are</li></ul>



			<p>visually impaired. STFC will respond to individual support needs on a case-by-case basis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• STFC will ensure the meeting venue is compatible with the use of hearing aid loops and will work with individuals to understand what other help can be provided.</li><li>• STFC will select a room that is light and airy, ensure that plenty of breaks are built into the agenda and ensure that colours chosen don't trigger migraines, different colours may assist in this if personnel don't bring their own laptops.</li></ul> <p>For virtual meetings this can also include, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• use of screen readers, closed captioning, automatic transcripts and keyboard accessibility. Teams follows the latest accessibility standards to ensure it is fully accessible for the latest screen readers.</li><li>• More frequent breaks will be scheduled into the agenda to allow adequate time away from the screen.</li></ul> <p>STFC will also consult with all Panel</p>
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			members/interviewees/other attendees to understand any specific requirements for participation and will accommodate where required.
Gender reassignment	Unknown	We do not have data to evidence any impacts	See general impacts above
Marriage or civil partnership	Unknown	We do not have data to evidence any impacts	See general impacts above
Pregnancy and maternity	Negative	<p>We do not have data to provide evidence but are aware that there can be negative impacts in terms of participation in physical meetings or in meeting opportunity deadlines which fall within the period of maternity leave – this can be especially so with consolidated grants rounds which take place on a 3-4 yearly cycle.</p> <p>An applicant’s career path and track record may be criticised due to the existence of a number of career breaks due to maternity/paternity.</p>	<p>STFC allows part time working and extensions to awards to support periods of pregnancy and maternity.</p> <p>STFC allows additional costs for childcare to be claimed for attending meetings and will also enable participation at meetings via Teams, wherever possible.</p> <p>We will discuss with applicants potential ways to avoid being locked out of Opportunities that happen on a long term cycle.</p>
Race	Unknown	We do not have data to evidence any impacts	See general impacts above
Religion or belief	Unknown	We do not have data to evidence any impacts	See general impacts above
Sex	None	Although UKRI diversity data shows that the pool of female applicants is much smaller than that of males for STFC, the overall success rates between the sexes is not so significant with a 1 percent difference between males (the slightly higher figure) and	See general impacts above



		females in both 2022/2023 and 2023/2024.	
Sexual orientation	Unknown	We do not have data to evidence any impacts	See general impacts above

## Impact on additional characteristics

Complete the table for all characteristics. You only need to add details if there is a positive or negative impact.

Additional characteristics	Impact (positive, negative, none or unknown)	Details of impact	Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact
Geographical location and place	Unknown	We do not have usable data or evidence but there may be impact on geographical spread based purely on where the groups that we support are based.	
Socio-economic status	Unknwn		
Education background	Unknown	UKRI eligibility rules have recently changed so that the applicant no longer needs to hold an academic position. Although there is likely still to be leaning towards those with PhDs, this should reduce impact on this characteristic but it is too soon to tell with the policy only line for a week.	
Parent or guardian responsibilities	Unknown	We have no evidence or data to support any impact but we appreciate that having caring responsibilities can affect an	See general impacts above We will also cover any additional costs of childcare above that



		individuals ability to attend meetings or meet deadlines.	required for the usual working day,
Carer responsibilities	Unknown	We have no evidence or data to support any impact but we appreciate that having caring responsibilities can affect an individuals ability to attend meetings or meet deadlines.	See general impacts above
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)	None		
Other characteristics	None		