Gathering Good Practices for Inclusive University Selection Processes

A Report of
Key Findings from
Regional Roundtables
with UK Universities

Contents

Background and Purpose

We held seven university roundtable discussions that brought together university colleagues from across the UK to share their strategies for promoting diversity and inclusion in university pre-selection processes for funding applications.

This work forms part of EPSRC's 3-year EDI Action Plan in which working with our university partners and other research organisations is an essential part of our plan, and this includes actions to explore universities' selection processes as per Action 2.10:

> **"Work with UKRI colleagues to understand the role of university selection processes on our portfolio with the aim of sharing good selection practices and providing clear communication on accepted good practices for fair selection".**

This action arose from findings within our 'Understanding our portfolio: a gender perspective' report, the community 'Have Your Say' survey on the report findings, and our Detailed Ethnicity Analysis and 'Ethnicity and Race Inequity In our Portfolio'. The findings from these reports indicated that there is a consistent underrepresentation of women and some ethnic minority groups across our portfolio and within more senior positions in academia, and this continues to be more prevalent as academic careers progress. One of the key barriers faced by women and ethnic minorities was identified as 'selection bias', which included university selection processes.

In the summer of 2023, we sent out a survey to start gathering some information about the approaches that different universities use to select projects and project leads/co-leads before submission of applications to EPSRC funding opportunities. We presented the key findings from the survey at the roundtable meetings, which were as follows:

■ Internal selection processes are primarily carried out for demand managed calls and for large and strategically important funding opportunities, not for ensuring diversity and inclusion of opportunity.

■ Few universities stated they collect diversity data during their internal selection processes, at any of the application stages.

■ The main reasons for not collecting diversity data during internal selection processes were stated to be:
  - a lack of time/resource,
  - data being held by HR,
  - GDPR concerns,
  - low disclosure rates and
  - numbers being too small.

■ Despite the lack of diversity data collection, it was clear that universities were doing various activities to be as inclusive as possible in their practices, and there were lots of examples of ways to attract and provide support to a wide range of applicants.

We held these regional roundtables to create communities of practice to support knowledge exchange. We also wanted to continue the conversation in more depth with a wider range of universities, and to include a diversity of staff members including research support staff, EDI leads and academics including heads of department and pro-vice chancellors.

At each of the roundtables we presented the background and purpose behind this work, which included an overview of EPSRC's 3-year EDI Action Plan, previous findings from our data that shows applications to EPSRC funding opportunities are not as diverse as they could be, and findings from the community engagements mentioned above that identified selection bias

as a key barrier for underrepresented groups. We also presented initiatives that EPSRC has already piloted to address this disparity, including asking universities submitting applications to EPSRC Innovation Fellowships in 2017 to submit a statement on their inclusive selection processes used to ensure a diverse applicant group. This resulted in a more diverse cohort of applicants and awardees in comparison to EPSRC Early Career Fellowships that were held around the same time.

The purpose of the roundtables has been to find out what different practices are being used across universities to ensure inclusive applicant and project selection. We would like to thank everyone at all the universities who attended and contributed to one of the regional roundtables. The feedback that has been provided on different experiences and examples of implementing inclusive practices into university selection processes has been very valuable and will inform the next stage of building a repository of good practices.

Key Findings from the University Regional Roundtables

Across all the regions it was found that internal selection processes are primarily carried out for demand managed funding opportunities (e.g. UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships) and for large and strategically important funding opportunities (e.g. EPSRC Centre's for Doctoral Training and Research Hub funding) to manage the volume of potential applications. Selection processes do vary across and within universities but in general they tend to include an Expression of Interest (EOI) stage that acts as a sift for the subsequent selection of applicants to be assessed by an internal panel. Most universities use an assessment process that is based on the funding opportunities' published criteria. Some use written applications for the EOI stage, whilst others provide pitching opportunities. There was a lot of variation with regards to where and who is involved in the selection processes. For example, some universities stated that all applications are assessed at the department level, whilst others stated that the selection is managed at a higher level within the school or faculty.

The key regional findings on the inclusive practices used during internal selection processes, including actions to encourage and support applicants from underrepresented groups are presented below. We have also captured:

■ details of the practices that haven't worked so well despite good intentions,

■ the main reasons why some applicants don't apply to EPSRC for funding or continue with their applications

■ the approaches used from the few universities who do manage to collect applicant diversity data

■ feedback and ideas for what EPSRC and UKRI could do to make improvements that would make the funding application process more inclusive and accessible for all

■ the barriers and drivers of demand management practices that are currently in operation within some funding opportunities across EPSRC and UKRI.

The overall approach to pre-selection for funding applications:

01 Expression of interest opens

02 Initial sifting of written applications or pitched idea

03 Final selection from assessment at an internal panel

Common Practices across all Regions

Key findings from the practices across all regions

Applicant/ Project Selection

- EDI and unconscious bias training
- Diversity on the panel
- Wide advertisement of opportunities

Support for Potential Applicants

- Grant-writing workshops
- Networking opportunities
- Mock interviews
- Mentoring
- Further support for unsuccessful applicants

Challenges

- Anonymous peer review
- Enforcing or mandating inclusive practices
- Opportunities for mid-career academics
- Harmonisation
- Maintaining diverse panels

These regional roundtables have given us an improved understanding of current selection processes and the various good inclusive practices for selection and support of applicants at different universities across the UK.
There were several good practices that were mentioned across all the roundtables, and these were as follows:

- Providing EDI and unconscious bias training to all staff involved in internal selection processes

- Ensuring a diverse representation of different backgrounds amongst panel members where possible and as far as resource and expertise will allow

- Wide advertisement of opportunities by different mechanisms (e.g. online, newsletter, emails, webinars)

- Grant writing application workshops and drop-in sessions for potential applicants

- Providing specific support mechanisms and networking opportunities for early career researchers

- Providing further support for unsuccessful applicants to help them with future applications and to encourage them to try again

- Running mock interviews for applicants to help them prepare

- Mentoring schemes (some of these aimed at underrepresented groups)

There were also some common challenges faced when trying to implement inclusive selection practices. We go into detail about one of these, which is diversity data collection, later in this report. Some of the other common difficulties that were mentioned at most if not all the roundtables included:

■ **Anonymous peer review –** whilst a lot of universities said they have trialed this as part of their internal selection processes, it has proved very difficult in practice. This is particularly the case at smaller or less research-intensive universities where the number of applicants is just too small, and where everyone knows each other. It also prevents being able to help mentor the applicant and provide feedback.

■ **Enforcing or mandating inclusive practices –** especially across the whole institution as there are different ways of doing things and different challenges in different departments. There is also limited resource and time to carry out internal selection processes, let alone ensure the process is fully inclusive.

■ **Diverse panels –** there are only a limited number of people to choose from within a university. This can result in overburdening people from minority groups, especially at less research-intensive universities.

■ **Support and opportunities for mid-career academics –** there tends to be more of a focus on Early Career Researchers (ECRs).

■ **Harmonisation of approaches across the institution –** this is particularly challenging at larger universities with a varied range of different departments and schools who have different priorities and ways of doing things.

Main reasons for not completing an application

Conflicting priorities and demands (e.g. teaching)

Lack of understanding about the funding application process

Demand management is discouraging due to the additional layer of assessment

Lack of time due to high workload

Lack of confidence

Lengthy process and length of time to hear the outcome has increased

Specific Practices by Region

London

Good Inclusive Practices used for Applicant/Project Selection

- **Workshops for training and guidance** on writing grant applications
- **Enforced gender and ethnicity panel targets** as per EPSRC's policy
- **Wide range advertising** of open funding opportunities including language used
- **Internal briefings** on specific funding opportunities
- **Pre-approaching individuals –** giving that tap on the shoulder to encourage them to apply

Support for Applicants

- **ECR network –** lead by ECRs themselves for peer support
- **Mentoring and role models as part of a formal development programme**
- **Specific workshops and discussion sessions aimed at minority groups**, for example UCL ran a leadership programme for women to support them to apply for large strategic grants
- **Flexible teaching requests for people with caring responsibilities –** where one term is kept free (not used for teaching). This is taken in turns across the department.
- **Detailed feedback for unsuccessful applicants –** to help and encourage them to try again
- **Extended deadlines for people with disabilities or caring responsibilities**
- **Offering hybrid option for meetings/interviews**
- **Practice pitching sessions –** to pitch a vision to leaders in their field for encouragement and advice
- **Peer support –** from previous successful applicants
- **Internal peer review system –** applications are also read by non-expert to assess if the proposal can be understood and appreciated by potential reviewers external to the field.
- **Outreaching –** expanding ECRs network and encouraging them to reach to public

Practices that haven't worked so well/could be improved

- Not able to mandate inclusive practice, especially across the whole institution as there are different ways of doing things and different challenges in different departments.
- Difficult to reach out to those who are not applying because of reduced staffing and lack of resources.
- Not able to know who is underrepresented as the data isn't collected at all or collected correctly.
- Diversity data collection is challenging for various reasons including; HR reservations or the numbers being too small to keep the data confidential.

- EDI staff networks don't necessarily have the right people who are eligible for the opportunity.
- Certain disciplines, e.g., Engineering, struggle with gender balance and so far, many initiatives are making minimum impact and this needs to go back to schooling across the country and globally.

Reasons for not completing an application

- Prior unsuccessful attempt(s)
- Low success rates, especially for minority groups
- Long wait and delays in hearing about the submission outcome(s)
- Teaching load and other administration responsibilities
- Applicants from minority groups may actually be put off when they are encouraged to apply because of their background, because they feel under pressure, as if more is expected from them.
- Clearer guidelines and inclusive workshops on 'how to apply' are required.

Midlands

Good Inclusive Practices used for Applicant/Project Selection

- **Mandatory EDI and unconscious bias training** across the university, which is regularly refreshed
- **Diverse Panels –** including the use of ECRs, Research Technical Professionals (RTPs) and external experts (from industry or local universities, especially when a collaborative application) to ensure a broader pool of participants. Visual diversity is also important to consider for interview panels (so minority groups see someone that 'looks like them' – puts them at ease).
- **Offering virtual or in-person panels** depending on different needs for inclusion and accessibility purposes.
- **Wide advertisement of opportunities** by different mechanisms (e.g. online, newsletter, emails, webinars) and disseminating information effectively across faculties
- **Transparency –** through standardised processes, open reviewer lists, and peer support etc
- **Working with other universities to run mock panels –** to better understand the peer review process and share resources
- **Access mentoring scheme** designed to increase representation in engineering groups
- **Inclusive environment and culture –** important to set a tone, where everyone welcomed and empowered to raise their concerns
- **In person networking events –** to bring people together to share ideas and make connections (offer a free lunch to encourage people to attend!)
- **Pitching opportunities –** an EOI stage in early grant development to help with idea generation and for feedback early on before formally applying

- **Setting an expectation** to apply for grant funding at least once every 48 months and keep a track of this. This way, people who don't apply often can be monitored and offered support and advice where needed.
- **Harmonisation of the approaches used for demand management processes** across the same institution
- **Utilising EDI Staff Networks** to reach out to underrepresented groups
- **Providing support from university EDI staff** to run practices to try and ensure things are as fair and as inclusive as possible

Support for Applicants

Multiple sources of support are beneficial, especially for unsuccessful applicants and individuals from diverse backgrounds. The suggestions from this roundtable included:

- **Flexible deadlines** that can be extended for personal reasons/extenuating circumstances where possible
- **Specific support aimed at ECRs** e.g workshops, drop ins or longer-term development/ training opportunities in cohorts. University of Leicester run a six-month grant development programme for ECRs.
- **Specific support aimed at other career levels –** University of Nottingham provide several programmes including a Research Leadership Accelerator programme aimed at mid-career, a Research Leaders programme aimed at established researchers (e.g. professors) and a Resilient Leadership in Action programme open to all career levels plus support for all with grant writing, networking etc.
- **Feedback being prioritised for unsuccessful applicants**
- **Mock Interviews –** which include a diverse panel.
- **Talks from previous successful applicants –** to share their experiences and talk about what is being looked for in your application and at interview.
- **Specific support with large grant applications –** University of Warwick have set up an interdisciplinary programme involving a group of experienced researchers who have led large projects that can be called upon to help applicants with their large grant applications.
- **Internal Mentoring and Peer Support –** to act as role models and provide encouragement for idea generation and support with writing applications

Practices that haven't worked so well/could be improved

- **Panel diversity –** this can result in certain individuals from underrepresented groups being overburdened
- **Challenges with data anonymisation** for small applicant pools
- **Identifying potential applicants that don't put themselves forward.**
- **Anonymous peer review –** this practice doesn't work well in universities and the process needs to be interactive for support and feedback to be of most value to the applicant
- **Harmonisation between different schools and departments** due to resource availability and different levels of expertise
- **Relying on HR data for applicant diversity data collection –** HR don't always understand why you're asking for it or can come up against GDPR constraints.

Reasons for not completing an application

- Lack of confidence among women academics (they tend to apply for smaller amounts of funding)
- Timelines and deadlines
- Teaching load and other important day work
- Time-consuming grant writing
- Mid-career researchers start to lose confidence and underestimate their potential.
- Some of the word limits (e.g. for R4RI) are very tight

North East, Yorkshire and Humber

Good Inclusive Practices used for Applicant/Project Selection Processes

- **EDI and unconscious bias training for panel members**
- **Wide range advertising –** including poster boards across the university.
- **Allowing 6-8 weeks for submissions –** if timing from the funder allow
- **Avoiding deadlines over holiday periods**
- **Internal peer review college**
- **Gender analysis of language tools** to ensure gender neutral language is used throughout advertisements and application forms
- **Actively approaching people to apply,** including looking for those that don't put themselves forward
- **Utilising cross-disciplinary panels –** to help broaden diversity and reduce the burden on the same minority panel members
- **Avoid having heads of departments on panels to avoid bias** for one particular discipline

Support for Applicants

- **Mock Interviews**
- **Narrative CV support and training**
- **Advice from staff networks** on support for neurodivergent applicants or where English isn't their first language
- **Providing interview questions in advance**
- **Cohort based training and community events for fellowships –** these are self-sustaining and supportive
- **Mentoring scheme for underrepresented groups**
- **Mentoring scheme aimed at mid-career academics**
- **Follow up support for unsuccessful applicants**, to encourage them to apply again
- **Clarity about the support that is available for people with disabilities and caring responsibilities** (e.g. flexible working patterns, reasonable adjustments) to encourage them to apply

- **Piloting a language centre aimed at academics where English is an additional language**
- **Option for in-person or virtual interviews**
- **Reciprocal mentoring between institutions**
- **Support for ECRs –** including workshops that provide an allocated time to write grant applications
- **Weekly drop-in sessions** for support and advice on writing grant applications
- **'How to fail and bounce back' type training session from successful grant holders –** to set people's expectations and to make them realise that success always starts with failure at first (i.e. successful people were once unsuccessful too).

Practices that haven't worked well/could be improved

- **Collecting and monitoring applicant diversity data –** due to issues with disclosure, anonymisation, and HR pushback, as well as not having the means to store it securely.
- **Consistency with implementing and sticking to inclusive practices** due to the time pressure
- **Resource for 1:1 coaching/support**, which has been decreased due to increased demand
- **Support and opportunities for mid-career academics**
- **Reviewers find the narrative CV more difficult to assess –** need to have some training or clearer guidance
- **Panel diversity –** the same people from minority groups are asked over and over due to small pool
- **Support programme spread over several weeks** didn't work well, so was changed to a series of intense sessions spread over 4 consecutive days – this encouraged more people to attend.

Reasons for not completing an application

- Not enough time due to other priorities (e.g. heavy teaching load)
- Difficulties with the narrative CV – especially for neurodivergent people or non-native English speakers
- Demand management puts off ECRs due to the additional layer of assessment and opportunities for bias to creep in
- Previous unsuccessful attempts – lowers people's confidence
- Lack of role models for minority groups
- Length of time to hear outcome from submission has increased, although this is due to the large volume of applications submitted and the lack of responses from reviewers.

North West

Good Inclusive Practices used for Applicant/Project Selection

- **EDI training** is given to all involved in the selection process stages
- **Providing peer review guidance documents/training**, including on unconscious bias. For example, University of Liverpool said that they have a panel principles document, based on the Nolan Principles, solely for peer review to ensure everyone follows an internal code for internal selection processes – this is focused on the principles to apply and not guidance on the process.
- **Mixed career representation on panels –** University of Salford and Manchester said they have moved away from only having a set of senior experts/directors on a panel, as they have found ECR's are less likely to have bias and it increases diversity. They also consider including professional support staff as they bring a different insight and understand the call aims well.
- **Independent research panel member –** University of Liverpool said this is an observation and advisory based role, to view the practices and call out anything that might indicate bias.
- **Implementing both written and verbal assessment styles** and weighing them equally (e.g. written EOI/application followed by pitch presentation or interview) to benefit differences in people's communication strengths/preferences.
- **Utilising EDI networks** to circulate information about open funding opportunities.
- **Providing incentives –** e.g. a trial opportunity was implemented for people to win a chance to pitch to the VC, with some prize money. This attracted lots of people who may not usually have applied and gave them experience.
- **Salford work with other Manchester universities** to run events and workshops for training or networking opportunities.
- **Hybrid approaches for meetings and interviews –** to include more virtual opportunities for disabled applicants and others that might need them. This broadens the opportunities for more people to be involved.
- **Avoid meetings/interviews too early/too late –** e.g. keeping between core hours of 10am and 4pm
- **Microsoft Team site (or equivalent)** is used for groups of academics to liaise with each other for support and advice
- **Joint-Project Lead approach –** deputy/co-project lead approach to put mid-career researchers to work with someone more established to encourage them to apply, and act as a stepping-stone to then lead themselves next time.

Support for Potential Applicants

- **Grant writing workshops and networking opportunities** aimed at researchers from underrepresented groups
- **Leadership training aimed at women –** who can lack confidence to put themselves forward to apply

- **Bringing together unsuccessful applicants with successful applicants –** to hear about and learn from their experiences, with the chance to build networks and be able to attend without the pressure of applying. Hearing that others are unsuccessful, and often are so many times before being successful helps others to feel they are in the same boat.

- **Mentoring –** particularly targeted at underrepresented groups (ethnic minorities, women)

- **Drop-in sessions open to all** are useful, rather than booking a formal meeting – although ensuring both options are available, to be accessible to everyone with different preferences.

- **Parental and Adoption Research Support scheme –** Lancaster University provides funding and support for academic and research staff taking maternity, paternity and shared parental or adoption leave, to prevent or minimise disruption to their research.

- **End of grant support –** to enable researchers to focus on getting papers published, networking, putting in more funding bids. An example mentioned they provide a 'bridging loan' for those coming to the end of their current contract.

- **Specific support for early career researchers (ECRs)**, in the form of training or forums where they are encouraged and invited to apply for opportunities

- **Sabbatical type scheme for ECRs –** School of Engineering at University of Manchester run this to allow ECRs to apply for 3 months of salary as 'buy out time' to help them focus on writing and applying for a fellowship

- **Providing detailed feedback and support for unsuccessful applicants** to try again. This makes it worthwhile for people to have another attempt at applying.

- **Additional support for non-fluent English speakers**

- **Ensuring people are aware of the support that is available –** one university said they found that changing their desk seating to be more open/hot desking, rather than offices hidden away, enables people to find the people they need to go to for support a lot easier. Just because the information of who to go to may be available online, it often isn't widely known about.

- **Ensure that there are a variety of support methods to benefit different communication styles/preferences –** e.g., in person meetings/zoom chats/or just written emails

Practices that haven't worked well/could be improved

- **Anonymous peer review –** particularly at less research intensive universities with fewer applicants. Everyone said that anonymous peer review is particularly tricky, and whilst a few universities mentioned they have trialed it, it's almost impossible to remove all information that identifies people when assessments occur internally.

- **Harmonisation of approaches to peer review and assessment within a university –** different departments do things differently

- **Panel diversity –** because individuals from underrepresented groups are overburdened in a small population pool.

- **Stretched with workload and time** on both sides (academic researchers and research support staff). There is a struggle between ensuring you get the right candidates, right panel members etc and organising everything within short time frames, as well as balancing it to ensure diversity and inclusion.

■ **Access to EDI data from HR –** especially at smaller universities where the numbers are too small to have it anonymised

Reasons for not completing an application

■ **Teaching load –** especially prominent for women.

■ **Caring responsibilities –** especially prominent for women at mid-career

■ **Lack of confidence** is common amongst women.

■ **Disabled applicants tend not to disclose**, so it's challenging for the research office colleagues to know who might need support/reaching out to

■ **Mid-career researchers can sometimes be 'left behind'** as lots of opportunities are either aimed at ECRs or more senior established academics. Mid-career researchers can lack confidence about taking the next steps to become leaders and/or become overwhelmed.

■ **Length of the application to funding decision peer review process**, including long waits for responses

■ **Short deadlines of funding opportunities –** or funding opportunities that are over holiday periods or those with a deadline shortly after returning to work after a holiday period.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Good Inclusive Practices used for Applicant/Project Selection

■ **Panel chairs to advocate for EDI and set the tone –** they play a key role in reminding everyone on the panel about EDI and unconscious bias, to set the tone for the meeting and ensure there is an active and conscious approach to addressing bias from everyone on the panel.

■ **Panels with a mixture of subject specialists vs diversity experts** who should be tasked with looking at different aspects and criteria

■ **ECR representation on panels –** valuable experience obtained to help advance their career and a different perspective brought to the panel.

■ **Anonymisation of some identifying information in applications to reduce bias –** Cardiff University said that even just removing the name at start of the proposal can has the effect of reminding panelists of unconscious bias.

■ **Working closely with the university EDI team** and academic researchers to share ideas and practices

■ **Collecting peer reviewer diversity data** to ensure diverse panels (e.g. through setting up a university peer review college to draw from)

■ **Representation of minority groups at workshops** and similar. to encourage people to apply

■ **Utilising EDI networks** to help spread the word about available opportunities

■ **Use of language decoders** for assessing dissemination materials, to make sure language is more inclusive at Queen's University Belfast.

Support for Applicants

■ **Further support and detailed feedback for unsuccessful applicants –** it is through the use of selection processes that enable universities to know about and able to reach those that need support and get experience/practice of writing a grant application (useful for ECRs).

■ **Mock Interviews**

■ **Making selection criteria explicit to applicants**, for example at Queen's University Belfast they ensure that the individual criteria are listed under each section heading of EOI form.

■ **Reasonable adjustments** if needed (e.g. sight of interview questions beforehand)

■ **Fellowship support programme –** run by University of Cardiff to build confidence at the early career and post-doctoral researcher stage and support with taking an application forward to submission

■ **Senior leadership programmes aimed at minority groups** (e.g. women and ethnic minorities) – at University of Edinburgh, these are administered across the university and are not discipline-specific.

■ **EDI networks provide specific support for minority applicants**

■ **Training courses on developing grant writing skills**

■ **Training courses on leadership aimed at mid-career academics**

■ **Mentoring**

■ **Additional mentoring and support for people who don't speak English as their first language –** e.g. help with writing skills and presentations

Practices that haven't worked well/could be improved

■ **Enforcing inclusive practices for selection of potential applicants** across all teams and departments within a university can be difficult, as there can be a difference in opinion between EDI leads and academic researchers about the best practices to take forward.

■ **Anonymous peer review –** all attendees said that this wasn't possible to undertake due to small numbers and keeping anonymity.

■ **Overburden of the same individuals from underrepresented groups** applies when trying to ensure panels are as diverse as possible

■ **Mid-career researchers –** there needs to be more attention and support aimed at mid-career researchers as often things are mostly aimed at ECRs or more senior established academics.

■ **Lack of EDI data is often not held by the Research Office**, instead often held by HR, which can cause challenges with collecting or accessing the right data

■ **Lack of resource to monitor diversity data** even if it is collected

■ **Data collection on disability** is particularly difficult as there are often low disclosure rates

- **Narrative CV can exacerbate a lack of confidence** for some, as it tends to work well when you sell yourself. That's difficult for some people
- **Reliance on traditional CVs within universities –** this has remained for some, despite UKRI removing track record and replacing with the R4R&I as part of the assessment
- **Random selection –** one university mentioned that they discussed the possibility of using partial randomisation, but this was met with negative feedback (due to a lack of understanding of the approach) and so it wasn't trialed.
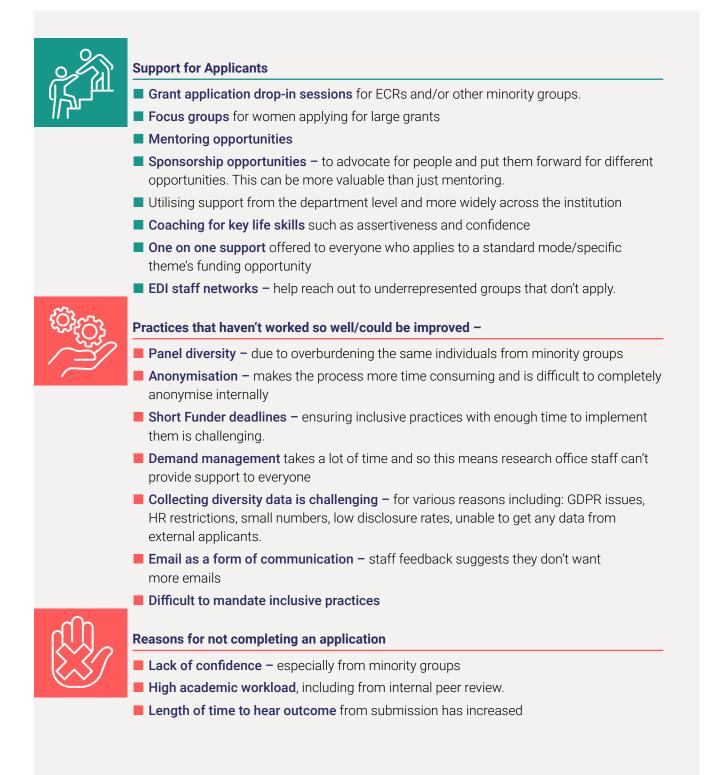
Reasons for not completing an application

- High workload
- Teaching responsibilities
- Lengthy application process
- Challenging to understand what is needed
- Lack of confidence
- Demand management puts people off, due to the additional layer of assessment and opportunities for bias to creep in

South East

Good Inclusive Practices used for Applicant/Project Selection

- **Observation from the Head of EDI –** observed the panel's selection process for applicants in the latest UKRI FLF round at University of Portsmouth.
- **EDI working group –** with the aim to understand the diversity profile of applicants. One of the objectives is to look at harmonising the approach to this across the university.
- **Qualitative data –** also very valuable alongside the numbers (i.e. people's lived experiences)
- **EDI and unconscious bias training for everyone**
- **Panel observers –** to look out for instances of bias
- **Proactive discussion and reflection about unconscious bias** at the start of the panel
- **Gender balance on panels –** University of Oxford aim for at least 30% women, following EPSRC's approach.
- **ECR representation on panels –** to increase diversity
- **Use of industrial partners on panels –** to increase diversity of perspective
- **Peer review college for panel member selection**
- **Partial randomisation pilot**
- **Minimising paperwork for reviewers and panel members**
- **Ensuring the application process is fully transparent for candidates**
- **Accessible content on webpages**

Support for Applicants

- **Grant application drop-in sessions** for ECRs and/or other minority groups.
- **Focus groups** for women applying for large grants
- **Mentoring opportunities**
- **Sponsorship opportunities –** to advocate for people and put them forward for different opportunities. This can be more valuable than just mentoring.
- Utilising support from the department level and more widely across the institution
- **Coaching for key life skills** such as assertiveness and confidence
- **One on one support** offered to everyone who applies to a standard mode/specific theme's funding opportunity
- **EDI staff networks –** help reach out to underrepresented groups that don't apply.

Practices that haven't worked so well/could be improved –

- **Panel diversity –** due to overburdening the same individuals from minority groups
- **Anonymisation –** makes the process more time consuming and is difficult to completely anonymise internally
- **Short Funder deadlines –** ensuring inclusive practices with enough time to implement them is challenging.
- **Demand management** takes a lot of time and so this means research office staff can't provide support to everyone
- **Collecting diversity data is challenging –** for various reasons including: GDPR issues, HR restrictions, small numbers, low disclosure rates, unable to get any data from external applicants.
- **Email as a form of communication –** staff feedback suggests they don't want more emails
- **Difficult to mandate inclusive practices**

Reasons for not completing an application

- **Lack of confidence –** especially from minority groups
- **High academic workload**, including from internal peer review.
- **Length of time to hear outcome** from submission has increased

South West and East

Good Inclusive Practices used for Applicant/Project Selection

- **Utilising networks and newsletters for wider advertising** of funding opportunities
- **Mandatory EDI and unconscious bias training** for panel members
- **'Breaking bias' guidelines –** at the University of Bristol they have moved beyond just being aware of unconscious bias. There needs to be a more proactive approach to think about conscious inclusion.
- **Diverse panel membership** using an internal peer review college
- **HR representative on panels –** to observe and ensure that the discussion remains just about the quality of the proposal.
- **Setting a minimum gender target on panels –** e.g., 30% women to replicate EPSRC panels.
- Importance of having a good panel chair to set the tone for the meeting and adhere to a fair assessment.
- **Avoiding meetings or interviews too early/too late, or on certain dates –** e.g., keeping between core hours of 10am and 4pm, avoiding school holidays, religious festivals etc.
- **Targeted emails –** to reach people who wouldn't otherwise put themselves forward to apply

Support for Applicants

- **Mentoring –** for subject specific support and to advise on career development and grant writing
- **Active advocacy –** very important for underrepresented groups who lack confidence.
- **Encouraging senior academics to include less experienced researchers on their applications as co-project-lead**
- **Specific support for working parents and people with caring responsibilities**
- **Specific support for ECRs**
- **One on one support –** where it is possible based on resource. Staff can form individual working relationships and hold conversations with each researcher.
- **Workshops for training and guidance** on writing grant applications
- **Mock panels**
- **Pitching sessions**
- **Accessible application materials** to accommodate diverse needs

Practices that haven't worked so well/could be improved

- **Panel diversity –** results overburdening the same people from minority groups
- Internal panels could be improved by having EDI champions on them, but for the same reason as above this isn't always possible

- **Reciprocal mentoring –** as it resulted in pairings with differing experiences and background, which didn't work
- **Anonymous peer review –** trials have had mixed results and often it doesn't work as it's impossible to completely anonymise internal applicants
- **Difficulty with diversity data collection –** various reasons including GDPR issues, not able to collect it for external applicants, numbers being too small.

Reasons for not completing an application

- Conflicting priorities and demands
- Lack of time due to high workload
- Funding opportunities having short timeframes or deadlines conflicting with certain times of year (e.g. religious festivals, school holidays)
- Lack of awareness of funding opportunities
- Not understanding the funding process or application system
- Put off by demand management and internal selection processes due to the additional layer of assessment and opportunities for bias to creep in
- Lack of confidence
- Some line managers don't provide enough support

Diversity Data Collection

Most universities fed back that there were various challenges and difficulties with collecting applicant diversity data during their pre-selection processes. The main reasons for this included:

- A lack of time/resource to manage it efficiently

- Restrictions in place from HR in allowing them to do it

- GDPR concerns about information security

- Low disclosure rates

- Numbers being too small with a risk of identifying individuals

Reasons for not collecting diversity data

Restrictions from HR	Number of applicants is too small	Lack of time or resource	Low disclosure rates	GDPR concerns

Universities that have been able to successfully collect applicant diversity data during their internal selection processes have done so by establishing a separate, centralised system or database which enables them to anonymise and hold the data securely. The data is collated over years or by the type of funding opportunity so that the numbers are not too small when looked at to risk identifying individuals. Examples of the mechanisms used to do this included:

- University of Aberdeen use the data analysis tool Power BI to enable efficient, secure and confidential storage and presentation of diversity data.

- Cardiff University are setting up a Centralised EDI data hub. HR are creating a new model within business intelligence, to look at how they can use EDI data internally and make it more accessible to understand the gaps and challenges.

- Cranfield University use Microsoft forms for diversity data collection as it enables them to only ask for the data once.

- University of Newcastle have used the university's job application system for collecting the data and use a central database to handle and store it securely.

- Portsmouth University use Google forms for diversity data collection, whereby the raw data is only accessible to HR, but a summary of the data in a rounded anonymised format can be shared.

- Sheffield Hallam University collect demographic data during the applicant selection process through a separate database to that which HR use. They ensure the data is encoded in a way to make it secure, and then displayed for use in tableau. Their raw data only gets looked at by minimum number of staff with special permissions.

Successful diversity data collection and monitoring methods rely on a centralised system or database to collect and hold the data securely

Power BI

Google forms

University job application system

Microsoft forms

Tableau

Centralised EDI data hub

Feedback for UKRI and EPSRC

The regional roundtables provided universities with a valuable opportunity to share their good practices and challenges with regards to inclusive pre-selection processes with each other and EPSRC. Attendees gave feedback about some of our (EPSRC and UKRI) current internal processes for funding opportunities, and how these can either inhibit or enable universities to efficiently manage their selection processes in an inclusive way.

Key issues that were raised are discussed below:

"There isn't enough time between announcement and deadlines"

This is the biggest issue that was raised across all the roundtables. Universities consider there is now a lot more expected of them, especially for demand managed calls, as they 'have to essentially do the job of a research council'. The short time window limits what research offices can do with regards to **inclusive** selection practices and reduces their ability to provide support for other funding opportunities during the same time period. Having more information, particularly on timelines, whether demand management will be needed and the planned assessment process at **the preannouncement stage** would be helpful in enabling more planning time.

"Lack of resource is a big problem for many universities, especially for those that are less research intensive"

Several universities said that internal peer review and selection means they end up having to play a similar role to that of a research council, despite not having enough resource. 'There just aren't enough staff to be able to provide enough of the support that applicants need, nor to efficiently manage and monitor internal selection processes in an inclusive way'. The burden on research office staff to carry out internal peer review can also have a negative knock-on impact on the funders peer review process. Reviewer response rates have decreased significantly in recent years. Reasons given include not having the time because of the reviewing they are having to do within their own institution as part of the internal demand management process.

"There was mixed feedback about the R4RI (narrative CV)"

It certainly appears there are pros and cons to the new UKRI Résumé for Research and Innovation (R4RI), which is our version of a narrative CV. Some universities said it's better than the traditional CV as it provides applicants with the opportunity to provide more evidence than just their track record over a wider range of assessment areas. However, this may likely benefit people who are better advocating for themselves, whilst disadvantaging those who are not. Could there be gender differences on the impact of narrative CVs because of this? It is known that women have less confidence. There was a also a lot of feedback that the narrative CV format is more problematic and less accessible for those who are neurodivergent or are non-English native speakers.

Most universities agreed that there **needs to be clearer guidance** for applicants on how to complete the R4RI, and for reviewers and panel members on how to assess it, especially when some of the questions differ between different funding opportunities. It would also be better if the word count for each section was increased, or at least was flexible depending on the number of applicants in the team. For multiple applicant/ multi institutional applications the small word count is problematic.

"There was mixed feedback about the new funding service (TFS)"

Some of the key issues raised included EDI/accessibility concerns, particularly for visually impaired applicants. These included:

■ TFS word count tool doesn't match other word count tools e.g. on Microsoft word etc. This is problematic for people with screen readers who need to write out their applications offline on other software applications like Microsoft word, because screen readers don't work well on TFS. This causes a mis-match between the final word counts once applicants copy their application text over onto TFS, and it can be unclear whether or not they have gone over the limit.

■ Text to speech software doesn't work with any of the downloads, because they are formatted as images, so the text isn't recognised.

There was considerable feedback about the increased length of time from submission of an application for funding to being informed of the outcome, which has led to some potential applicants being discouraged from applying. Other concerns raised included the layout of information provided on the funding finder for open funding opportunities, where it was mentioned that it can be difficult to find what you're looking for. However, there was some positive feedback about TFS, including how it is a lot easier to navigate than JeS, which now seems rather outdated.

We encourage positive or negative feedback on TFS as either an applicant user or reviewer/panel member since all feedback helps UKRI improve its processes. You can do this via:

■ Funding Service Feedback: https://airtable.com/appj6osCTyP9dGvrL/shrDlfX6wle4cftUR

■ Peer Review Meeting Questionnaire: https://engagementhub.ukri.org/epsrc-peerreview/epsrc-peer-review-meeting-questionnaire/
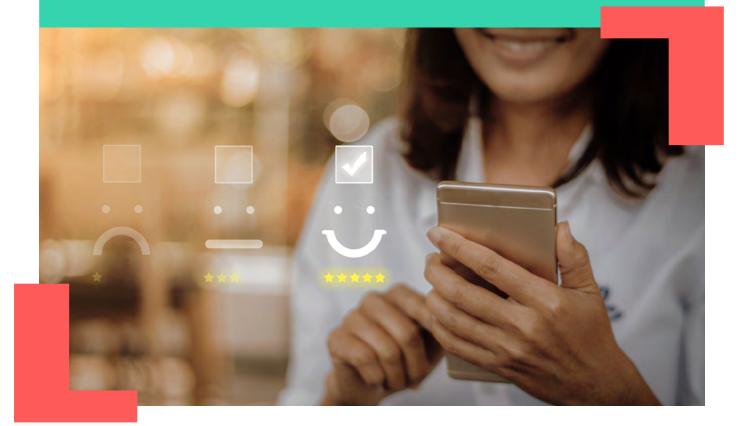
"Funder visits are always very welcome"

Visits from EPSRC staff to universities help potential applicants to gain new contacts in their research areas from EPSRC and to network, which can help encourage people to apply. It's reassuring for academics to meet programme lead(s) in person. We welcome EPSRC staff meeting a wide range of people from all career stages on their visits.

"We should ensure there is standardisation across all funding opportunities"

Currently, there can be differences (e.g., assessment criteria, types of roles eligible, timings etc.), between different funding opportunities offered across UKRI, even between those with a similar scope. This lack of harmonisation makes it more complex for people applying. Although, it was recognised that UKRI are harmonising across the Simpler Better Funding programme and that the situation has been improved. Many preferred the new cascade funding opportunity design of information.

It was considered that there are much higher expectations for some funding opportunities than there used to be, with a lot of wording and a lot less clarity. A suggestion was made that we should get external/community feedback on wording before each funding opportunity gets published.

Next Steps

We would like to thank everyone who attended and contributed to one of the regional roundtables. The feedback that has been provided on different experiences and examples of implementing inclusive practices into university selection processes has been very valuable and will help us to carry out the next stage of building communities of practice and a repository of good practices. This will include:

- Highlighting the set of good practices in our EPSRC EDI Expectations toolkit (version 2 currently in development)

- Sharing the findings with UKRI and British Academy EDI Caucus (EDICa)

- Working with the EPSRC EDI Hub+ to support and empower our community to embed good practices in EDI

  - The hub will link regions across the 4 nations of the UK

  - Connecting people and knowledge together

  - Sharing and evaluating 'what works'

We also acknowledge the feedback you provided for EPSRC and UKRI on our own current practices as part of our funding opportunities and the grant application process. This will be fed back to the relevant people involved in funding policy decisions.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to one of the regional roundtables. Here is the full list of attendees from across each of the regions.

London

University	Attendees
King's College London	■ Oksana Kasyutich, Associate Director, Doctoral Partnerships ■ Barbara Shollock, Head of Department of Engineering ■ Martin Broadstock, Head of Research Culture
University College London	■ Laura Fenner, Senior Research Facilitator ■ Andrew Wills, Vice-Dean (Research) for the Faculty of Mathematical and Physical Sciences ■ Peter Munro, Vice-Dean (Research) for the Faculty of Engineering Sciences
Queen Mary University of London	■ Akram Alomainy, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Science and Engineering ■ Caludia Garetto, Faculty EDI Lead, Faculty of Science and Engineering
Royal Holloway, University of London	■ Ruth Livesey, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation ■ Sue Starbuck, Director of Research and Innovation ■ Marcela Acuna Rivera, Research Development Manager
University West England	■ Phillipa Shelton, Senior Research and Business Development Manager

Midlands

University	Attendees
Aston University	■ Tony Dodd, Deputy Dean for Research ■ Purbani Chakrabarti, Strategic Funding Manager
Coventry University	■ Carolyn Wynne, Doctoral College Director and Research EDI Lead ■ Susie Maugham, Research Funding Executive ■ Jonathan Godsall, Research Funding and Development Officer
Cranfield University	■ Deryn Evans, Research Grants Team Manager ■ Geoffrey Neale, RAEng Research Fellow and Lecturer in the Composites and Advanced Materials Centre ■ Naomi Benjamin, University Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Lead, People and Culture
De Montfort University	■ Philip McTernan, Associate PVC Research and Head of Doctoral College ■ Lucy Gregson Green, Head of Research Development

University of Birmingham	■ Hisham Mehanna, Director of the Institute of Head and Neck Studies and Education
	■ Dr Leona Morton, Head of Research Strategy and Development, MDS
University of Leicester	■ Clare Edwards, Head of Research and Partnership Development
	■ Stephen Ison, Research and Partnership Development Manager
University of Lincoln	■ Belinda Colston, the Director of the Eleanor Glanville Centre at UoL
	■ Kaitlin Kelly, Research Development Officer specialising in UK government funding bodies
University of Nottingham	■ Madeleine Craze, Senior Research and KE Development Manager
	■ Claire Edwards, Senior Research and KE Development Manager, Research Growth
	■ Rachel Van Krimpen, Faculty of Science Director of EDI and People
University of Warwick	■ Tomomi Kimura, Research Strategy and Development Manager
	■ Andrea Howard, Research Strategy and Development Manager,
	■ Rika Nair, Research Culture Manager
University of Wolverhampton	■ Silvia Haycox, Pre-Award Funding Manager

North East, Yorkshire and Humber

University	Attendees
Durham University	■ Jamie Grimwade, Senior Research Development Manager
	■ Lasairfhiona Swift, Research Grants and Contracts Manager
University of Leeds	■ Bharat Phokrel, Research Development Manager for Engineering and Physical Sciences
	■ Andrew Meggs, Research Development and Infrastructure Support Officer
	■ Faye Robinson, Head of Research Development
Newcastle University	■ Sharron Kuznesof, Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering (SAgE)
	■ Sarah Warner, Research Funding Development Manager, SAgE
	■ Ian Head, Dean of Research and Innovation, SAgE
Northumbria University	■ David Young, Research Development Manager
	■ Hamdi Torun, Chair of the University's EPSRC Funder Liaison Group, Professor in Electrical Engineering
	■ Dominika Zabiegaj, EDI+ Network Fellow, Assistant Professor in Mechanical Engineering
Institute of Physics	■ Sarah Bakewell, Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)
The University of Sheffield	■ Claire Garwood, Head of Faculty research support (Engineering)
	■ Claire Sykes, Head of Faculty research support (Science)
	■ Meera Warrier, Assistant Director, Researchers and Research Culture

Sheffield Hallam University	■ Sam Coulby, Senior Business Partner, Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
	■ Gaynor Miller Head of Researcher and Innovator Development Academy
	■ Marjory Da Costa Abreu, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computing

North West

University	Attendees
University of Chester	■ Elizabeth Christopher, Director of Research and KE
De Montfont University	■ Donna Bentley, Research Governance Manager (couldn't attend the Midlands meeting)
Liverpool Hope University	■ Gill Smylie, Research and Innovation Manager
	■ Anurahda Ranasinge, Senior Lecturer in Robotics
Lancaster University	■ Yvonne Fox, Associate Director of Research Services
	■ Anne-Marie Houghton, Dean of EDI
	■ Mandy Dillon, Senior Research Development
University of Liverpool	■ Anna Taylor, Senior Peer Review Manager, Research and Partnerships
	■ Cate Cowton, Research Development and Impact Manager, Faculty of Science and Engineering
	■ Abby Haworth, Lecturer, Outreach and Inclusion in Engineering
University of Manchester	■ Caroline Jay, Professor of Computer Science and Head of Research in the School of Engineering
	■ Viddy Peesapati, Senior Lecturer in Electric and Electronic Engineering
	■ Daniel Twiddy, Research Services Operations Manager
University of Salford	■ Luke Postlethwaite, Head of Funding Development / Research and Knowledge Exchange
	■ Rachel Woolley, Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange
	■ Kathy New, Associate Dean Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

University	Attendees
Swansea University	■ Julie Griffiths, Senior Research Development Officer
	■ Laura Healy, Research Quality and Excellence Manager
	■ Anna Seager, Research Culture Manager
Ulster University	■ Cara McShane, Research Staff Development Officer
University of Glasgow	■ Lynne McCorrinston, Business Development Manager
	■ Maria McPhillips, Head of Strategic Research Initiatives
University of Aberdeen	■ Nir Oren, Professor of Computing Science
	■ Elizabeth-Ann Rattray, Director of Research and Innovation
	■ Ben Tatler, Professor of Psychology

Bangor University	■ Alison Wiggett, Research Concordat Manager
	■ Panagiotis Ritsos, Lecturer in Visualisation / Director of Research
	■ Markus Gellesch, Research and Impact Development Manager
Cardiff University	■ Mari Nowell, College Research Development Manager
	■ Cosimo Inserra, Deputy Director of Research at the School of Physics and Astronomy
Heriot-Watt University	■ Beatrice Pelloni, Professor of Mathematics
	■ Vicki Stone, Deputy Executive Dean
	■ Craig Landt, Research Development Manager
University of St Andrews	■ Angela Johnston, Senior Research Information Officer
	■ Jen Pritchard, Research Information Manager
	■ Akira O'Connor, Senior Lecturer
Aberystwyth University	■ Emma Davies, Associate Lecturer in Accounting and Finance.
	■ Dylan Eurig Jones, Diversity and Inclusion Manager
The University of Edinburgh	■ Alex Peden, Head of Research Cultures
	■ Jennifer Hazelton, Head of Research Funding
	■ Andrew Mount, Dean of Research
Queens University Belfast	■ Tom Gibson, Research Development Manager
	■ Mani Narayanan, Research Development Manager
	■ Alistair Quinn, EPS Manager in Business Alliance
University of Strathclyde	■ Marco Reggiani, Research Associate Civil and Environmental Engineering
	■ Antony Weir, Assistant Director and Head of Strategic Research and Knowledge Exchange
Institute of Physics	■ Jane Smith, Equality Diversity and Inclusion Programme Manager

South East

University	Attendees
University of Oxford	■ Hannah Lingard, Head of Research Facilitation
	■ Natia Sopromadze, Research Culture Facilitator
	■ Kathleen Dolan, Strategic Research Manager
University of Southampton	■ Rebecca Hoyle, Assoc Vice-President Interdisciplinary Research
	■ Manda Banerji, Associate Dean for EDI, Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences
	■ Ying Chen, Head of Research Funding Development
University of Reading	■ Bonhi Bhattacharya, Senior Research Development Manager
	■ Chris Daw, Research Division Lead Mathematics and Statistics
Institute of Physics	■ Sarah Bakewell, Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)
University of Portsmouth	■ Ryan Parker, Grants Officer and Chair of the RIS EDI Committee
	■ Jim Briggs, Director of the Centre for Healthcare Modelling and Informatics (CHMI)
University of Surrey	■ Yuni Kim, Strategic Research Development Manager

South West and East

University	Attendees
Royal Academy of Engineering	■ Christina Guindy, Associate Director, Research Programmes and Awards
University of Bath	■ Colin Waring, Research Development Manager ■ Kate Charles, Head of Research Development ■ Despina Moschou, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering and Design
University of Birmingham	■ Leah-Nani Alconcel, Spacecraft Engineer and Lecturer in the School of Metallurgy and Materials (Couldn't attend the Midland's Roundtable)
University of Bristol	■ Tracy Brunnock, Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion ■ Dr Neha Chandarana, Lecturer in Bio-based and Sustainable Composites ■ Dr Caroline McKinnon, Deputy Head of EDI
University of Cambridge	■ Ndunge Kivuity, Equality Diversity and Inclusion Section Head ■ Christopher Bird, Deputy Director, Research Relations, Schools of Physical Sciences and Technology ■ Gordana Najdanovic, Head of Research Funding
University of Essex	■ Alice Williams, Research Development Manager for Strategic Bids ■ Sophie Bromage, Head of Resourcing (People and Culture Section, Resourcing Team) ■ Murat Akman, Senior Lecturer in Mathematics
University of Exeter	■ Chloe Onoufriou, Assistant Director of Research Development and Management
University of Hertfordshire	■ Darragh Murrane, Professor of Pharmaceutics, Associate Dean for Enterprise, School of Life and Medical Sciences ■ Annalisa Jones, Head of Research Grants and Deputy Director of the Research Office
University of the West of England	■ Kate Trigg, Research and Knowledge Exchange Development Manager ■ Darren Reynolds, Professor of Health and Environment