



UK Research
and Innovation

UK Research and Innovation Equality Impact Assessment Form



*See guidance document for detailed support.

* Delete the guidance text in the response column when completing your EIA.

Overview of activity

	Response
Name of activity being assessed	Fundamental AI Lab
Council/department/project team	EPSRC – AI & Robotics
Aims and objectives of the activity	<p>Deliver a funding opportunity at pace in collaboration with DSIT. Total fund: ~£40M total (£38M research grant at 80% FEC, £2M training grant at 100% FEC) along with up to 2M GPU hours per year in-kind compute. The current ambition is for the grant to begin on 1 May 2026 which will require the team to work at pace and consider policy exemption sign off.</p> <p>The funding will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure the UK’s stake in the next generation of AI systems • Strengthen the UK’s talent pipeline and attract leading researchers internationally • Bolster collaborative networks across the UK’s academic institutions • Grow UK research capacity cementing the UK as a global leader in AI • Attract inward investment from frontier labs, multinational investment and private capital <p>Aspects of the activity covered by the EIA include advertising the funding opportunity, the application process, building a panel and hosting the panel meeting, and post-award activities.</p>
Who is affected by your policy/funding activity/event?	Applicants, panel members, awardee, and students funded through the training grant.
What data and consultation have you used?	<p>Previous funding opportunities lessons learnt with EPSRC.</p> <p>The design of the awards and the assurance questions draw on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UKRI’s 2024 Statement of expectations for doctoral training • EPSRC’s assurance process for the Global AI Fellowships funding opportunity and UKRI’s agreed questions for doctoral training assurance processes • EPSRC equality, diversity, and inclusion action plan 2022 to 2025 – UKRI • The UK government’s ambitions for AI in the UK, laid out in the AI Opportunities Action Plan



Analysing your impact

In addition to data gathering and consultation, the guidance materials should be used to assist in identifying impacts on different groups.

Protected characteristics

Protected characteristic	Positive impact or opportunity to benefit	Negative impact	Please explain the impact or why there is no impact including details of any evidence/data used	Detail actions taken/ that will be taken to increase positive or reduce negative impact (or why action is not possible). Detail how you plan to measure the relevant outcomes and outputs of your activity.
	Leave blank if there is no impact or unknown			
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited reach and scope of activity	
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	All information provided is in written format. Interview panel meeting is intended to be in-person at Caxton House for UKRI staff and panellists. Caxton house is accessible. Alignment to UKRI training grant T&Cs ensures provision for student medical leave.	Reasonable adjustments for specific requirements will be made, including the option for panellists to join virtually. Applicants will be encouraged to be co-located and join virtually. Students will be able to apply for disabled students' allowance.
Gender reassignment (Trans identity)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited reach and scope of activity	
Marriage or civil partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited reach and scope of activity	

Pregnancy and maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Participation in activity could be restricted by lack of availability during the application and assurance process, due to parental leave / caring responsibilities / pregnancy. Alignment to UKRI training grant T&Cs ensures provision for student parental leave if required.	Reasonable adjustments will be made for individuals if required at all stages of the process. Timetable of key dates will be made available to applicants as early as possible.
Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	EPSRC's decision to increase the international students' cap from 30 – 50% may have a positive indirect effect on the balance of nationality.	
Religion or belief	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Some religious festivals and holy days occur during the six-week period where the opportunity opens, closes, and the interview panel takes place.	The timeline has been adjusted to maximise the period the opportunity is open, so that applicants have more time to prepare their proposals and build a team, while still allowing for the 1 May 2026 award start date. The assurance process is also being designed to reduce workloads on UKRI staff and panellists, being mindful of that short two-week window between the opportunity closing and the interview panel taking place.
Sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited reach and scope of activity	
Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The panel will fall under EPSRC's mixed gender policy.	

Additional characteristics

Additional characteristics	Positive impact or opportunity to benefit	Negative impact	Please explain the impact including details of any evidence/data used	Detail actions taken/ that will be taken to increase positive or reduce negative impact (or why action is not possible).
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	Leave blank if there is no impact or unknown			
Geographical location and place (consider UK and international offices)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	n/a	
Socio-economic status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provision of funded studentships and the ability to provide enhanced stipends will have the potential to attract students from lower income backgrounds.	
Education background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	n/a	
Parent/guardian responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Applicants may have reduced availability during the application and assurance process, if they have parenting responsibilities.	Timetable of key dates will be made available to applicants as far in advance as possible.
Carer/parent carer responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Applicants may have reduced availability during the application and assurance process, if they have caring responsibilities.	Timetable of key dates will be made available to applicants as far in advance as possible.
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	n/a	
Other characteristics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	n/a	



Are there **general or overarching impacts on multiple groups**? What actions will you take to increase positive impact, or reduce/mitigate negative impact?

In-person meetings can present as negative barriers for disabled people, as well as those with parental or caring responsibilities. The interview panel meeting will be hybrid, reducing access issues for applicants, as well as travel and overnight stay requirements, and facilitate the use of personal equipment (e.g. allowing caption use). However, UKRI staff will be co-located with panellists at Caxton House to facilitate communication with and within the panel. Staff will endeavour to support panellists by asking if they have any access requirements and scheduling frequent breaks.

EPSRC have maximised the period the opportunity is open, while still allowing for the 1 May 2026 award start date. The research grant will initially be awarded for 18 months, with a stage-gate review at 6 months, while the training grant will be awarded to extend support for the full six-year duration. The assurance process is being designed to balance the need for due diligence, delivery at pace, and security of funding. The stage-gate allows for a simplified application process to take place in 2026 for what would otherwise be a large research programme. The stage-gate timing allows for fixed-term staff to be recruited and have a minimum of 6-months advance notice of whether funding will be continued or stopped. Appropriate assurance for the number of studentships being provided during the award's lifetime, regardless of the stage-gate outcome, provides the host organisation the security of funding required to recruit doctoral students.

Awards will be made to institutions who in turn oversee student recruitment. UKRI won't have direct oversight of possible discrimination against individual applicants, on the basis of any protected characteristic. This is mitigated by requiring a clear approach to oversee fair recruitment and student pastoral support through the assurance process, as well as monitoring and evaluation through the grant lifetime.

The funding opportunity has an emphasis on EDI. The opportunity insists on a costed EDI role and is referenced frequently in assessment criteria. EDI will also form a key part of the stage-gate for releasing more funding.

Potential panellists may find co-locating at Polaris House a barrier to getting involved. We will provide the option to join virtually if needed to secure a diverse panel and



	<p>adhere to EPSRC's mixed-gender panel policy, which requires a 30% target representation for the underrepresented gender on panels.</p>
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Evaluation

Final Decision:	Select the relevant box	Include any explanation / justification required
1. No negative or positive impact identified; therefore, activity will proceed .	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Adapt or change the activity in a way which you think will eliminate negative impact or promote equality.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Stop the activity because the evidence shows bias or negative impact towards one or more groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Barriers and impact identified, however having considered all available options carefully, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the activity (e.g. in extreme cases or where positive action is taken). Therefore, you are going to proceed with caution with this activity knowing that it may favour some people less than others, providing justification for this decision.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mitigations have been put in place to reduce potential negative impacts. Due to the required strategic timescales, potential impacts cannot be fully mitigated. EPSRC will proceed with caution and the impacts will continue to be monitored as the activity develops. This EIA document will be updated if required.

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Review and sign off

What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the impact of your activity?	EPSRC intend to include the award in their annual monitoring of training grants. A review of the EIA will be included as part of the stage-gate review of the research grant and any closure or lessons learned activity.
Next review date:	February 2027

Will this EIA be published? * Yes/Not required	Yes
Point of contact	AI.Robotics@epsrc.ukri.org
Signed off by (name and date):	Lisa Coles Head of AI and Robotics EPSRC, 24/02/26

Change log

Name	Date	Version	Change

Continued below...

Action plan

Action	Deadline	Owner	How will it be monitored?	What is/will be the impact/outcome?
<p>Timetable of key dates will be made available to applicants as far in advance as possible.</p> <p>Once we had confirmation from DSIT of their funding, EPSRC strategic framework universities were informed of the funding opportunity, the week before it was published. In the funding opportunity we have included dates for expression of interest closing, the interview panel, and when interview timings will be confirmed.</p>	3 March 2026	AI & Robotics team	The opportunity will be updated whenever there has been a timeline change.	Applicants will have as much information as possible to enable them to make decisions and submit the strongest applications.
The timeline has been adjusted to maximise the period the opportunity is open.	February 2026	AI & Robotics team	N/A	Applicants have more time to prepare their proposals and build a team, while still allowing for the 1 May 2026 award start date.
A stage-gate review has been agreed. Assessment criteria at both stages are being developed to provide appropriate assurance e.g.,	January 2026	AI & Robotics team	This can be monitored through submissions to the first and second opportunity along with assessor comments and feedback.	Enabled a simpler initial application process, given the timeframe, that is less onerous on applicants, assessors, and UKRI staff.

initially assessing vision and ability to lead a large programme, then later assessing partnerships and RRI in more depth.			The AI & Robotics team will use feedback from the initial stage to inform writing the assessment criteria for stage-gate.	Maintained appropriate assurance for a £40M programme as we can assess EDI in more depth at the stage-gate review.
Stage-gate review has been timed so that the outcome is known 6 months before the initial grant is due to end.	January 2026	AI & Robotics team	Monitored through appropriate assessment processes and record keeping.	Allows for fixed-term staff to be recruited and have a minimum of 6-months advance notice of whether funding will be continued or stopped.
The interview panel meeting will be hybrid and applicants will be asked what times they can't do for interviews.	16 April 2026	AI & Robotics team	The AI & Robotics team will use feedback from the initial stage to inform planning of the stage-gate	Reduced access issues for applicants, as well as travel and overnight stay requirements, and will facilitate the use of personal equipment (e.g. allowing caption use).
The interview panel timings will include frequent breaks and be shared with the panellists and applicants as early as possible.	13 April 2026	AI & Robotics team	A wash up meeting and recording of lessons learnt.	Applicants, panellists and UKRI staff given time to plan ahead and aid their involvement in the panel.
The assessment process includes a requirement for host organisations to have a clear approach to oversee fair recruitment and student pastoral support, and monitoring will take place at least annually throughout the training grant's lifetime.	31 March 2026	AI & Robotics team	This will form the basis of some assessment questions and opportunity will be given to follow up during interview. Monitoring plan will be developed and in place during the life of the award/s. This will be a collaboration between	Mitigated UKRI not having direct oversight of possible discrimination against individual applicants, on the basis of any protected characteristic, as student recruitment will be overseen by host organisations.

			EPSRC, DSIT and the award holder.	
Requirement for a costed EDI role and EDI is referenced frequently in assessment criteria. EDI will also form a key part of the stage-gate for releasing more funding.	May 2027	AI & Robotics team	EDI will continue to be a key area of these and subsequent awards. The effectiveness of specific roles will be monitored on and ongoing basis. We will consider best practice from experts in this area and other large grants with costed EDI roles.	Rightly highlights EDI as an area of focus for EPSRC and UKRI.
We will provide the option for panellists to join virtually if needed to secure a diverse panel.	March 2026	AI & Robotics team	Monitored through exploring reasonable adjustments as and when appropriate and record keeping.	Adherence to EPSRC's mixed-gender panel policy, which requires a 30% target representation for the underrepresented gender on panels.