



# UK Research and Innovation Equality Impact Assessment Form

## About your activity

### Title of your activity

Introduction of institutional caps to Early Independence: BBSRC Fellowships 2026

### Council or business area

BBSRC

### Aims and objectives

The aim of this fellowship is to support talented researchers to:

- lead their own research plans to establish their own research niche
- make the first step-change towards independence

For the 2026 Fellowships round, BBSRC introduced for the first time an outline application stage. 586 outline applications were received, which represented a 110% increase compared to the number of full applications received in 2025. BBSRC has calculated that a maximum of 80-100 full applications can be fairly reviewed, assessed and processed in this round. Due to this unprecedented increase in the number of applications, a demand management strategy has been implemented retrospectively, after the project outlines were submitted. The host institutions have been asked to carry out internal shortlisting and to each put forward full stage applications from a maximum number of candidates, which has been calculated based on the size of the research base within the research organisation. This EIA aims to recognise the impact this strategy may have on the research community, particularly the applicants.

### Who is affected?

- fellowship applicants
- applicant support staff (for example, mentors, research office staff)
- institutional staff carrying out the shortlisting process



## What data and consultation have you used?

- Annual application numbers to the BBSRC Fellowships programme
- Protected characteristics data (age, gender, ethnicity and disability) for BBSRC fellowships
- Consultation with STFC and UKRI teams who have used demand management approaches
- CRAC-Vitae evaluation on UKRI FLF inclusive selection

## Impact on specific groups

### Are there general impacts on multiple groups?

Although BBSRC reserved the right to amend the assessment process as necessary in response to unexpected demand, such a substantial change to the process is unlikely to have been anticipated by members of our community. It is expected that this will have caused anxiety and stress for many, including applicants, research office staff and reviewers. This could have far reaching implications that may not be captured in this EIA.

BBSRC are not prescribing operational expectations for internal selection processes, rather they are to be devised at the discretion of the individual institution. To maintain transparency of these processes and mitigate their potential negative EDI impacts, institutions have been asked to submit an inclusive selection statement. This will outline how they have ensured their selection process is inclusive.

There are risks associated with institutional selection that could impact individuals across multiple characteristics:

- More experienced applicants could be favoured over less experienced applicants (who might be less experienced due to their age, disability, career path or other reasons).
- Some institutions may have close knit communities where applicants are well known or easily identified, increasing the risk of intentional and unintentional bias.
- Selection panels may not reflect the diversity of their institution's applicants
- Selection processes could introduce additional requirements of applicants, such as interviews or further written applications
- Applicants may not receive constructive feedback

To minimise these risks, BBSRC:

- provide appropriate examples of actions that can be taken to support inclusive selection (these are provided in the inclusive selection statement guidance and are intended for consideration only, rather than being prescriptive)
- recommend that organisations conduct their own Equality Impact Assessment ahead of conducting their internal selection
- recommend that institution's internal selection panels are diverse, trained to identify unconscious bias and empowered to call out bias
- strongly recommend that organisations provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants
- will convene experts to review institution's inclusive selection statements and provide constructive feedback for future consideration



Additionally, there is a risk that the reduced number of full applications submitted to BBSRC will, as a portfolio, represent a less diverse or un-representative cohort of potential fellows. This could be exacerbated by the number of institutions asked to submit just one application. To minimise this risk, BBSRC will:

- monitor applicant diversity before and after internal selection by comparing the applicant EDI data at the outline and full application stages
- consider portfolio management approaches for subsequent stages of the assessment process, for example, guaranteed interviews for under-represented groups

## Impact on protected characteristics

Protected characteristic	Impact (positive, negative, none or unknown)	Details of impact	Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact
Age	Negative	<p>Around 70% of prior applicants to this programme were in the 30-39 age bracket.</p> <p>There is a risk that younger applicants may not be shortlisted by institutions due to having less quantifiable experience (e.g. publications) than older applicants.</p> <p>Given the scheme is targeted at early career individuals, there is also potential for misinterpretation and bias against older applicants, particularly those who may have taken a career break or otherwise be applying from a less traditional career path.</p>	<p>BBSRC recommend use of narrative CVs to assess applicants and their skills, not just simple metrics</p> <p>BBSRC will provide clear communication that individuals should be assessed relevant to their career stage. BBSRC anticipate seeing applicants from a range of career stages relevant to the call</p>
Disability	Negative	<p>Though not recommended by BBSRC, institutions may devise a shortlisting process which requires further engagement from applicants, such as an interview or further written application. Individuals with a disability</p>	<p>BBSRC do not recommend internal selection processes that require further engagement from applicants, such as interviews. Institutions should make reasonable adjustments during their shortlisting process if it</p>



		may encounter a barrier in this engagement.	requires further engagement from applicants.
Gender reassignment			
Marriage or civil partnership			
Pregnancy and maternity	Negative	<p>Though not recommended by BBSRC, institutions may devise a shortlisting process which requires further engagement from applicants, such as an interview or further written application. Individuals on parental leave may not be able to engage in this way.</p> <p>Previous pregnancies/maternity leave may impact basic metrics such as publications and research revenue, thus impacting competitive shortlisting processes, where they otherwise might not have via external peer review.</p>	<p>BBSRC's timelines and expectations for application remain largely unaltered from the original call (with submission of full stage applications opening in July 2026 and closing in September 2026). Therefore, this situation should only be a barrier if the institutional selection process differs substantially from BBSRC's expectations of a full stage application, which BBSRC do not recommend. Institutions should offer appropriate reasonable adjustments during their shortlisting process.</p> <p>BBSRC recommend use of narrative CVs to assess applicants and their skills as a whole, not just simple metrics.</p>
Race	Negative	There is a risk that internal selection panels are not reflective of the diversity of their institution	BBSRC recommends that institutions pursue appropriately diverse selection panels and that institutions conduct their own equality impact assessment for their selection process
Religion or belief		Though not recommended by BBSRC, institutions may devise a shortlisting process which requires further engagement from applicants, such as an interview or further written application. Religious holidays could	BBSRC do not recommend internal selection processes that require further engagement from applicants, such as interviews. Where organisations wish to pursue these, they should plan their processes to include reasonable adjustments required for any relevant religion or belief.



		coincide with these selection processes and pose a barrier.	
Sex		There is a risk that internal selection panels are not diverse	BBSRC recommends that institutions pursue appropriately diverse selection panels and that institutions conduct their own equality impact assessment for their selection process
Sexual orientation	Negative	Biases and discrimination against members of the LGBTQ+ community have been documented across the research and innovation sector. Individuals applying may be subject to the conscious or unconscious biases of their internal colleagues assessing their application.	BBSRC recommends that internal selection panellists are trained to identify unconscious bias and empowered to call out biases.

## 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	Negative	Applicants may wish to change host institution while their application is under assessment.	Host institutions can decide whether to accept outline-stage candidates that originally applied from another research organisation, provided the institutions liaise to ensure that each applicant is only reviewed once.



			If full-stage applicants wish to change host institution they should inform BBSRC who will review and support such requests on a case-by-case basis.
Socio-economic status	Negative		
Education background	Negative	Individuals who have not gained a PhD may not be selected due to a perception that they have less research experience	BBSRC Fellowships are open to applicants without a PhD, provided they can demonstrate equivalent research experience. BBSRC will provide clear communication to highlight the remit and features of the call.
Parent or guardian responsibilities	Negative	Though not recommended by BBSRC, institutions may devise a shortlisting process which requires further engagement from applicants, such as an interview or further written application. Individuals with coinciding parent or guardian responsibilities may find it difficult to engage in such processes.	BBSRC's timelines and expectations for application remain largely unaltered from the original call (with submission of full stage applications opening in July 2026 and closing in September 2026). Therefore, this situation should only be a barrier if the institutional selection process differs substantially from BBSRC's expectations of a full stage application, which BBSRC do not recommend. Where this is the case, institutions should offer appropriate reasonable adjustments during their shortlisting process.
Carer responsibilities	Negative	Though not recommended by BBSRC, institutions may devise a shortlisting process which requires further engagement from applicants, such as an interview or further written application. Individuals with coinciding caring responsibilities may find it difficult to engage in such processes.	BBSRC's timelines and expectations for application remain largely unaltered from the original call (with submission of full stage applications opening in July 2026 and closing in September 2026). Therefore, this situation should only be a barrier if the institutional selection process differs substantially from BBSRC's expectations of a full stage



			application, which BBSRC do not recommend. Where this is the case, institutions should offer appropriate reasonable adjustments during their shortlisting process.
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)			
Other characteristics			

## Final decision

### Make a decision on whether to proceed with the activity

4. Barriers and impact identified, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the activity. Proceed with caution with this activity knowing the impact

## Review and sign off

### How will you monitor and review the impact of your activity?

The Inclusive selection statements will be read by BBSRC staff and assessed by external experts.

BBSRC will compare the EDI data of applicants to the outline stage with the full stage of the 2026 call, and to calls from prior years.

The EIA will be reviewed after inclusive selection statements have been reviewed.

### What is the EIA review date?

October 2026

## Contact



Aidan Grimsley: [aidan.grimsley@bbsrc.ukri.org](mailto:aidan.grimsley@bbsrc.ukri.org)

## Will the EIA be published?

Yes

## Who has this been signed off by?

Robert Hardwick, Associate Director People and Talent (17/06/26)

## Change log

Include changes as you've reviewed the EIA. For example, based on input received from x at the announcement of opportunity stage, x was added

Name	Date	Version	Change
Aidan Grimsley	17/06/2026	1	Version 1
		2	
		3	