



UK Research
and Innovation

UK Research and Innovation
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Form
for
Research England Strategic Institutional
Research Funding (SIRF) Review



Overview of activity

	Response
Name of activity being assessed	Strategic Institutional Research Funding (SIRF) Review
Council/department/project team	Research England, Research Directorate, Research Funding team
Aims and objectives of the activity	Research England (RE) is reviewing its approach to strategic institutional research funding (SIRF). We plan to consult the higher education sector on any potential changes to our research funding. This EIA encompasses the whole SIRF Review. A distinct programme of work reviewing the transparency of our funding is also being conducted alongside and in alignment with the SIRF Review. The term ‘strategic institutional research funding’ (SIRF) covers all formula-driven research funding allocations made to English Higher Education Providers (HEPs) that can be used flexibly by the providers to serve their wider strategic priorities. This includes: • All Quality Related Research (QR) funding streams • Research Capital Infrastructure Funding (RCIF) • Specialist Provider Element (SPE) • Ring-fenced funds: Policy Support Fund, Participatory Research Fund and Enhancing Research Culture fund. This EIA is intended to cover the overall delivery and approach of the SIRF Review including delivery of our intended stakeholder engagement activities. Potential barriers and impact (both positive and negative) of the delivery of the SIRF Review on protected characteristics, in addition to general EDI considerations of the way in which we project-manage the SIRF Review, from scoping through delivery to the MEL stage (monitoring, evaluation, and learning) are reviewed in this EIA. Any proposed changes to our formula-based funding allocations will be addressed by separate EIAs. The aim of the SIRF Review is to review the effectiveness of RE’s approach to strategic institutional research funding by confirming the principles that underpin our approach and considering the way in which we currently deliver our funding against these. (This review does not extend to RE project funding schemes which are competitive, nor to any of RE’s knowledge exchange funding).

The **objectives** listed below outline the purpose of SIRF and how RE uses it to support the research sector, by:

- recognising research quality across the wide range of areas of research strength
- enabling HEPs' strategic autonomy, providing flexibility for providers to develop and progress their own research strategies and agenda
- balancing stability and dynamism: SIRF seeks to balance specific funding for new priorities through ring-fenced funds, and stable longer-term funding streams (stable funding allocations over multiple years facilitates strategic planning within HEPs, the flexibility of the funding supports agile responses to changing priorities and new opportunities)
- supporting people and culture, and contributing to building and maintaining an inclusive research system
- driving research impact, supporting an engaged and impactful research system that connects research with wider society to bring about positive socioeconomic change
- enabling partnerships and promoting collaboration across the research sector, including higher education providers, industry, charities and communities to promote a diverse, resilient and connected system
- enhancing and increasing the effective use of research infrastructure across the sector
- balancing the need for accountability and transparency of public funding while managing administrative burden

Rationale for the review

While there have been studies of individual elements of RE's research funding approach over recent years, it is some time since consideration was given to this funding programme across all elements of formula driven research funding. Undertaking a review between REF cycles also ensures that any changes can be reflected alongside the outcomes of the next REF while minimising funding perturbation.

Intended EDI outcomes of the SIRF Review:

- The SIRF Review delivery will contribute towards the delivery of the UKRI overall strategy and [equality, diversity and inclusion \(EDI\) strategy](#), in particular the objective to *"include and support a diversity of people and ideas through our funding and partnerships"*.
- By developing and reviewing our research funding principles we will ensure that these principles support the design and delivery of research and innovation that creates benefits and opportunities for all.
- By reviewing the current effectiveness of our research funding against our confirmed principles, we will identify where improvements to our funding mechanisms can be made and optimise research delivery in ways

	that create positive impacts of our funding on those with protected characteristics and EDI considerations in general. • By developing and implementing improved transparency mechanisms around the use of our funding we will contribute to supporting a thriving and open research and innovation system based on evidence. This will help contribute to an open and transparent research culture and to ensuring equal opportunities for individuals, communities, and institutions. • It should be noted that RE's strategic institutional research funding is unhypothecated and directed to institutions, not individuals, therefore any EDI impact of the funding is indirect and not within RE's control.
Who is affected by your policy/funding activity/event?	All eligible institutions currently in receipt of RE formula-based research funding and their research communities, i.e., individuals and groups employed at the institutions as researchers, technical staff, research support professionals, people studying at PGR level or otherwise engaged in the delivery of research and innovation activities funded using the above-mentioned, formula-driven RE allocation, for example, research partners beyond academia in the private and charitable sectors. They all have a range of protected and additional EDI characteristics. Additionally, on an organisational level, a range of types of higher education institutions will be impacted by this review. Internally, RE Research Directorate who deliver the review and the Executive Team who lead the organisation.
What data and consultation have you used?	- HE Staff record data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and available on their website https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis - The EIA for formula-based funding produced previously in 2019-2020 (archived internally) - The EIA of RE's Institutions Engagement Strategy undertaken in 2019, available on RE website https://www.ukri.org/publications/institutional-engagement-strategy-and-equality-impact-assessment/ - The provisional EIA conducted by the Future Research Assessment Programme published in June 2023 As the EIA is a live document, we will update this list with qualitative and quantitative data obtained from new sources and any future consultation activity we perform, including with the RE Expert Advisory Group on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. Our intention is for this to be ongoing until the review of SIRF is completed.

Analysing general impact

Are there general or overarching impacts on multiple groups/that affect more than one protected characteristic? What actions will you take to increase positive impact, or reduce/mitigate negative impact?	The review is focused on policy which guides our distribution of funding for institutions, rather than individuals and projects; the policy does not have a personal, direct impact on individuals with protected characteristics. Any suspected causality is affected by factors beyond funding from Research England and occurs in the context of providers making autonomous decisions on how to use the flexible formula-based funding. However, we recognise that there are inequalities inherent in higher education, reflective of our wider society. There are additional inequalities that are compounded by the broader higher education system and research structures. Robust planning at the outset of this review and monitoring it throughout is ensuring that: • any potential EDI impacts of the SIRF Review delivery are managed (i.e. identified and, if negative, either mitigated or avoided) • EDI impacts of any policy changes enacted through the delivery of the SIRF Review will also be managed in a similar way, as much as it is within Research England's sphere of influence. Where we are made aware of potential or realised negative impacts of the SIRF Review, we will look to remedy these as soon as possible. Separate Equality Impact Assessments may be used. In due time, implementing recommendations from the review may indirectly have a positive impact on some groups and individuals with protected characteristics. This type of positive impact cannot be solely attributed to RE quality-related funding and the policy guiding its distribution, but we hope that our review may contribute to improvements in the higher education sector research activity in England, thus helping to drive the development of a more equitable and inclusive research system. Our approach to project management, communication and engagement within the review <i>“will pay due regard to the range of equality issues affecting the higher education sector, including low representation of women and ethnic minorities in senior leadership positions, and career pathways for young researchers at early stages in their careers. The under or over-representation of some protected characteristics in research communities and in university</i>
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	<i>leadership is of particular interest to RE</i>¹. We recognise that different types of institutions have different staff demographics. <u>Stakeholder engagement process</u> Our stakeholder engagement activities will collect evidence and feedback to input into the review and shape the outcomes, which will decide any proposed changes to our formula-driven research funding streams. If stakeholder engagement events and opportunities are not planned with equality and inclusion in mind, they are likely to exclude a number of the protected characteristics identified below. This would reduce the feedback and input into the review from people with these protected characteristics, which reduces the likelihood that any negative impacts of our current funding streams, or proposed changes, will be identified during the review process. This in turn would increase the likelihood that the review would propose changes to funding streams that might have an unintended negative impact, which would only be identified at the later consultation stage, or possibly not identified at all. Therefore, our stakeholder engagement will be designed to avoid this if possible, to reduce the need to mitigate any negative impact or reverse proposed changes at a later date. <u>Communications plan</u> Any planned communication activity around the SIRF Review will need to account for intersectionality and a number of EDI considerations to ensure that any potential negative impact is avoided. Relevant Research England activities include, but are not limited to: • Ensuring that any communication on the SIRF Review is presented in a range of accessible formats (e.g., HTML format which is screen-reader friendly, video recordings with closed captioning enabled) • Ensuring that our communications release timings avoid major religious holidays and school holidays, to ensure that we reach the widest audience in a timely manner. • Using a variety of methods for communication to ensure that as much of the sector as possible has access to this information e.g., webinars, website updates, emails, in-person meetings, social media, RE news page. <u>Embedding EDI in project-managing the SIRF review</u> Since the beginning of the project design phase, we have:
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¹ See the Equality Impact Assessment of Research England's Sector Engagement Strategy, available online <https://www.ukri.org/publications/institutional-engagement-strategy-and-equality-impact-assessment/>

	• Introduced EDI as a regular standing item at our SIRF working group (WG) meetings. • Engaged with RE colleagues with relevant EDI knowledge and experience (namely, the Head of People and Culture and the Associate Director for Research Environment) and invited them to the SIRF working group when needed. • Met with the RE EDI Expert Advisory Group – a collective of external experts from the higher education community. As SIRF review work packages progress, future engagement with the group will be undertaken and reviewed appropriately. • Produced this EIA for the SIRF Review as a 'live document' and scheduled to update it at appropriate intervals as the review work progresses. See the Action Log for details. <u>Monitoring and evaluation through business mechanisms</u> We will monitor and evaluate to evidence the impact of our activities on our objectives for the project and contained within UKRI's strategy. As with other SIRF Review activity, we will ensure that this approach is accessible and inclusive.
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Impact on 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	☐	☒	General assumption: Age and seniority in career stages often, but not always, overlap. Comms: University leadership teams and senior academic staff are likely to be those groups that have access to the greatest amount of communication	To provide information regarding the SIRF review and to access feedback based on lived experience across career stages and therefore across age groups, we will consider some targeted engagement opportunities

			regarding this SIRF review from RE, for example via targeted emails and not just information in the public domain. Engagement: University leadership teams and senior academic staff are likely to be those groups that engage most heavily with the SIRF Review (for example, through 1:1 conversations with RE, and invitation-only events). If the majority of engagement with the review is from age groups that are over-represented in these positions (see HESA data), this may lead to any changes to our funding streams positively impacting these senior age and career groups, whilst impacts of changes to our funding on researchers/members of staff on earlier career stages, many of them – younger, may not be understood adequately.	and communication, including for example early career researchers, so as not to exclude any age group.
Disability	☐	☒	Comms and engagement: if SIRF review updates for the public, and/or the opportunities for HEP community to get involved in consultations, aren't accessible, this will limit the participation of community members with disabilities, and how informed they are, which may in turn mean RE won't identify some of the potential impacts of changes to how we allocate funding on individuals and groups with physical and/or mental disabilities.	To access feedback based on lived experience and keep this part of our community informed of the progress and outcome of the SIRF review, we will ensure that our engagement events, communication channels and content are accessible for people with disabilities.
Gender reassignment (Trans identity)	☐	☒	Engagement: There is a risk of mis-gendering or deadnaming (that is, referring to a transgender or non-binary person by a name they were given at birth but no longer use) our community members involved in SIRF review consultations by RE staff at engagement events. Otherwise, no impact identified.	Online and in person engagement events will begin with checking with participants how they prefer to be addressed. We will also encourage a voluntary use of pronouns in videoconferencing usernames and on physical name badges. If we gather information on protected

				characteristics, our surveys will include a range of self-identification options, including a free text 'other gender' box.
Marriage or civil partnership	☐	☐	No impact identified, marriage or civil partnership should not be affected by the SIRC Review's delivery or in how it is communicated.	Not applicable
Pregnancy and maternity	☐	☒	Comms: Those on parental leave over the course of the SIRC Review may return and be uninformed of any changes made and the status/purpose of the review. If SIRC review updates for the public are only published as news items which go down the priority list on the website as other news are announced, community members on parental leave or on holidays due to parental responsibilities will miss them. Engagement: If the opportunities for community to get involved in consultations does not include sufficient breaks and spaces for pregnant and breast-feeding participants, this will limit the participation of community members, which may in turn mean RE won't identify some of the potential impacts of changes to how we allocate funding on individuals and groups with this protected characteristic.	To keep this part of our community informed of the progress and outcome of the SIRC review, we will use a mix of news items and more permanent web pages so people returning to work after a period of pregnancy and parental leave will be able to find the information on RE website. When appropriate we will provide communication in advance of our proposed activity of the SIRC Review to give notice of planned activity. We will summarise activity carried out to date and the steps that led to these decisions and actions. Stakeholder events and engagement opportunities will start after 10am and should finish before typical school pick up time. Timings of events should vary by day and time to allow flexibility and increase the likelihood that those with maternity responsibilities can attend. Event venues will be chosen with consideration that a private room

				should be available for breastfeeding and extracting milk, and participants will be informed where to find the room. Recordings of any information sessions should be made available after events to allow people to engage when convenient. Any community engagement during the delivery of the review will include breaks and avoid school holidays and typical school drop off and pick up times.
Race	☐	☐	Engagement in the SIRC Review with only people in senior positions in the higher education sector could seriously limit input from people from minority ethnic backgrounds due to the currently low representation on senior career levels. It could also put undue burden on the limited representation at this level. Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups are underrepresented in the UK research community, and particularly at senior positions, as per HESA statistical data quoted earlier in the 'Age' section. The completion of the SIRC Review itself should not negatively or positively impact this protected characteristic. However, for context, it is important to be aware of the current makeup of the research and innovation sector in England (e.g. Black, Asian and minority ethnic people are underrepresented in the research community, and particularly at senior positions (HESA	The RE Expert Advisory Group on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion will be consulted where applicable.

			data – 88% professors are white), and of any barriers to wider participation in research from all ethnicities.	
Religion or belief	☐	☒	Comms: Those on holidays due to religious purposes over the course of the SIRC Review may return and be uninformed of any changes made and the status/purpose of the review. If SIRC review updates for the public are only published as news items which go down the priority list on the website as other news are announced, community members away e.g. due to major religious holidays or a personal pilgrimage or religious retreat, will miss them. Engagement: If the opportunities for community to get involved in consultations clash with major religious holidays, this will limit the participation of community members, which may in turn mean RE won't identify some of the potential impacts of changes to how we allocate funding on individuals and groups with this protected characteristic. The completion of the SIRC should not negatively or positively impact this protected characteristic. For context, due to the voluntary nature of reporting certain protected characteristics including religion and belief, it may be difficult to acquire evidence or information that informs our impact analysis of the SIRC Review delivery on this characteristic.	Just like in case of parenthood characteristic, we will keep this part of our community informed of the progress and outcome of the SIRC review, we will use a mix of news items and more permanent web pages so people returning to work after a period of leave related to religious occasions will be able to find the information on RE website. When appropriate, we will provide communication in advance of our proposed activity of the SIRC Review to give notice of planned activity. We will summarise activity carried out to date and the steps that led to these decisions and actions. By spreading engagement activity throughout each year, we may ensure engagement with the review by individuals observing religious holidays. Recordings of any information sessions should be made available after events to allow people to engage when convenient.

Sexual orientation	☐	☐	No impact identified. Sexual orientation should not affect opportunities to stay informed of and engage with the review.	Not applicable
Sex	☐	☒	Engagement: The only legally recognised options for sex in the UK are 'female' and 'male'. Therefore, some community members who were born with both sets of reproductive organs (hermaphroditism) or don't identify with either of these sex options may feel excluded if no 'other' option is provided if EDI data is being collected for monitoring purposes during virtual or in person engagement.	If we need to collect EDI data as part of any of our engagement during the review, the questionnaires we use will include a range of self-identification options, including 'neither' or 'other sex'.

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).
	Leave blank if there is no impact or unknown			
Geographical location and place (consider UK and international offices)	☐	☐	Engagement: Some community members may not be able to travel to engagement events far from their place of residence. Recognising the distribution of HEPs across England and the location of research-intensive ones in particular, acknowledging their highest density in the London and South East region, this could have an impact on representative engagement of individuals. RE formula research funding is distributed across England, including all regions.	In-person engagement events will either offer a hybrid participation option or be organised in locations which are well-suited to facilitate a broad geographic representation of our community members.

Socio-economic status	☐	☐	Engagement: Some community members on lower income/under-resourced socioeconomic status may not be able to travel to engagement events far from their place of residence.	In-person engagement events will either offer a hybrid participation option or be organised in locations which are well-suited to facilitate representation of our community members from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and statuses.
Education background	☐	☐	There is nothing to suggest that this characteristic will be impacted in the delivery of the SIRF Review.	
Parent/guardian responsibilities	☐	☐	Comms and engagement: There is a risk that SIRF Review activities could be scheduled for times when parents/guardians are less likely to be available e.g., August, post-4.00pm, which would reduce the input into the review from these groups. All parents may need breaks during virtual engagement to attend to their parenting responsibilities.	Spreading our comms and engagement activity throughout the year, inviting participants sufficiently in advance, and avoiding school holidays where possible will enable participation. Stakeholder events and engagement opportunities will start after 10am and should finish before typical school pick up time. Timings of events should vary by day and time to allow flexibility and increase the likelihood that those with parent/guardian responsibilities can attend. Recordings of any information sessions should be made available after events to allow people to engage when convenient.
Carer/parent carer responsibilities	☐	☐	Comms and engagement: Some carers care for adults but some – for school-aged children. In the latter case, there is a risk that SIRF Review activities could be scheduled for times when such carers are less likely to be available e.g., August, post-4.00pm, which would reduce the input into the review from these groups. All carers may need breaks during	Spreading our comms and engagement activity throughout the year, inviting participants sufficiently in advance, scheduling sufficient breaks and avoiding school holidays where possible will enable participation.

			virtual engagement to attend to their caring responsibilities.	Stakeholder events and engagement opportunities will start after 10am and should finish before typical school pick up time. Timings of events should vary by day and time to allow flexibility and increase the likelihood that those with caring responsibilities can attend. Recordings of any information sessions should be made available after events to allow people to engage when convenient.
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)	☐	☐	Comms and engagement: RE only funds English higher education providers. However, funders and sector members from devolved nations, including Northern Ireland, may be invited to some of the engagement events and access SIIRF Review related comms.	Participation of Northern Irish stakeholders in any SIRF review events will be planned in an inclusive way, regardless of their political opinions. Code of Conduct of all events will require respect of all participants towards all participants, regardless of where they are on the political spectrum.
Other characteristics	☐	☐	<i>None identified.</i>	

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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 .	☐	
2. Adapt or change the activity in a way which you think will eliminate negative impact or promote equality.	☒	We currently have no evidence to suggest that the SIRF Review should not continue at this stage. All Research England staff involved in the SIRF review are required to undertake UKRI EDI fundamentals training. We intend for this EIA to be a live document, and we will review and update it periodically in the delivery of the SIRF Review, adapting how we conduct the Review if needed.
3. Stop the activity because the evidence shows bias or negative impact towards one or more groups.	☐	
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.	☐	

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Review and sign off

What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the impact of your activity?	As the review progresses, we will monitor how the SIRF review activity enables participation across EDI characteristics. We will schedule regular reviews of this EIA. We will use the internal SIRF Review Working Group as a forum to consider and implement updates. Long-term, we will also evaluate the impact of our delivery of the SIRF Review. The first version of the EIA has been published on our externally facing SIRF web page in August 2024. We are using it as a living document throughout the delivery of the review, updating when our monitoring of impacts requires it. We will engage periodically with the RE EDI Expert Advisory Group on our EIA and embed EDI considerations within all of activity connected to the delivery of the SIRF Review.
Next review date:	Summer of 2027

Will this EIA be published? * Yes/Not required	Yes *EIA's should be published alongside relevant funding activities, for example funding opportunities and events.
Point of contact	Agnieszka Siewicz, Senior Policy Advisor, Research England Email: researchpolicy@researchengland.org.uk
Signed off by Senior Responsible Owner (name and date):	Anna Lang and Alex Herbert-Guest, Research Funding Directors, Research England, UKRI Date: 5th May 2026

Once the EIA is completed or updated, upload it to UKRI central repository via [the EIA submission form](#)



Name	Date	Version	Change
Fist version of SIRF Review EIA published	8 th August 2024	1.0	This is the initial version, and the Equality Impact Assessment will evolve as our review progresses. Changes will be recorded in this log.
Updated SIRF Review EIA	May 2026	2.0	The following content has been refreshed in the EIA: • ‘Analysing general impact’ paragraph, to reflect the SIRF Impact Evaluation and include minor edits • Change of tense from Future Simple to Present Perfect where applicable • Clarification that the Transparency Programme has a separate EIA • A reference to the UKRI strategy added • Staff ownership in the Action Plan table updated.

Action plan

Use the table below to define the actions you intend to take (or have taken) to address the indications of negative impact you have identified or to promote equality. Actions should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound).

Action	Deadline	Owner	How will it be monitored?	What is/will be the impact/outcome?
Activities in the communications and engagement plan for the SIRF Review to not be scheduled in time periods when there are major religious occasions and/or school holidays	Individually for every event and comms piece.	Senior Policy Advisor(s) leading on communications for the SIRF Review	As a standing agenda item at regular meetings of Research England SIRF Review internal working group.	Keeping the entire community informed of our progress.

Ensure accessibility of in person and virtual engagement as per all actions listed against protected and additional characteristics above.	Individually for every event.	Collectively all RE staff involved in the SIRC review, split by workstreams.	As a standing agenda item at regular meetings of Research England SIRC Review internal working group.	Enabling participation of diverse groups and individuals.
Assemble an evidence base to inform future iterations of this EIA.	End of October 2025	Collectively all RE staff involved in the SIRC review, split by workstreams.	Identification of desirable data sources and confirmation that these have been obtained or created.	Continuously identifying and mitigating barriers to EDI and capitalising on opportunities.
Include a wide range of different groups in the SIRC Review Comms and Stakeholder Engagement Plan	Individually for every event.	Collectively all RE staff involved in the SIRC review, split by workstreams.	Monitoring of attendance by using optional EDI questionnaires.	RE engages with a broad spectrum of individuals and groups with a range of EDI characteristics.
Consider and implement, if needed, updates to this EIA at least once every year as the SIRC review progresses.	Until the end of the SIRC review.	Aga J. Siewicz, Senior Policy Advisor	As a standing agenda item at regular meetings of Research England SIRC Review internal working group.	Continuously identifying and mitigating barriers to EDI and capitalising on opportunities.