

UK Research and Innovation Equality Impact Assessment Form

About your activity

Title of your activity

EPSRC New Investigator Award (NIA): OPP01286 (Updated Guidance)

Council or business area

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), Talent and Skills Team

Aims and objectives

EPSRC's New Investigator Award (NIA) is designed to support early career researchers (ECRs) in establishing research independence by enabling them to develop their own research vision, build capability and lead their first significant research project. The scheme plays a key role within the EPSRC portfolio in supporting researchers with their transition to independence. The scheme is open to applicants from a range of backgrounds, including those with non-linear career paths and those transitioning from industry.

EPSRC is updating the eligibility and associated website content for the NIA to ensure the scheme continues to effectively support ECRs transitioning to independence, while improving clarity, consistency and accessibility for applicants and research organisations. The updated guidance is supported by revised website content, designed to better reflect the purpose of the NIA and provide clearer, more consistent information for applicants and research organisations.

The updates do **not** change the fundamental purpose, scope or assessment criteria of the scheme.

This updated scheme guidance clarifies:

- Eligibility rules, including funding history, application history, career stage

As part of these updates, eligibility thresholds have been revised to reflect increases in research and grant costs, including inflationary pressures, and to ensure the scheme continues to support researchers at an appropriate point in their transition to independence. Specifically, the definition of a 'significant grant' has increased from £100,000 to £175,000, the permitted



duration of postdoctoral researcher supervision has increased from 6 months to 12 months, and the previous £20,000 limit on capital equipment has been removed. These changes are intended to better reflect contemporary research practices and costs, and the overall aim of the NIA, while maintaining the focus of the NIA on supporting early career researchers to establish research independence.

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) recognises the impacts relating to the broader operation of the NIA scheme, whilst also considering whether the updates introduce new impacts, exacerbate existing inequalities, or provide opportunities to reduce barriers for applicants with protected or additional characteristics.

Who is affected?

- Prospective applicants to the NIA (including early career academics and those with non-linear or non-academic career paths).
- Researchers who are not eligible for the scheme (for example, those who have already achieved research independence or held significant grants), who may be affected by how eligibility is defined.
- Research organisations and research offices supporting applicants.
- EPSRC assessors and panel members.
- EPSRC staff administering and managing the opportunity.

What data and consultation have you used?

This assessment draws on:

- Previous EIAs for the NIA and similar research council-led schemes.
- UKRI diversity data for applicants and awardees (including sex, ethnicity and disability).
- EPSRC internal data on NIA applicant demographics and patterns of submission.
- Feedback and recurring queries received from applicants and research offices in previous NIA applications.
- Internal consultation with Portfolio Managers, Heads of Programme, and the Talent and Skills team during development of the updated guidance.
- External consultation with Research Office staff (institution-based teams responsible for supporting, reviewing and submitting grant applications), including a call for feedback via EPSRC Termly Briefings.
- The UKRI EIA guidance, including advice on protected and additional characteristics, intersectionality, proportionality and mitigation of barriers.
- [EPSRC's EDI Action Plan 2026-29](#)

Impact on specific groups

Are there general impacts on multiple groups?

The NIA, as delivered through the updated guidance, is expected to have a positive impact across multiple groups by providing clearer and more accessible information on eligibility and expectations.

Clear and consistent guidance reduces reliance on informal networks or institutional interpretation, which can otherwise disadvantage applicants at institutions with less established research support.

This is particularly important for those who:

- Are first-time applicants to EPSRC
- Are based at institutions with less established research office infrastructure
- Have non-linear, non-academic or international career paths
- Have caring responsibilities or require additional time to engage with application guidance.

Experience from previous consultation indicates that unclear eligibility rules and inconsistent interpretation can disproportionately disadvantage such applicants.

Improving clarity and transparency in this early career opportunity is therefore expected to help remove unintended barriers to participation and supports equitable access to the scheme. This is in line with UKRI's objective of fostering a research and innovation system that is inclusive and accessible.

The eligibility thresholds also contribute positively by aligning the scheme with increased research costs and funding levels, including inflationary pressures. These updates reduce the likelihood that applicants are excluded due to relatively small early grants or short periods of postdoctoral supervision. This is particularly relevant in laboratory-based and capital-intensive research disciplines.

More broadly, clearer guidance also reduces inequality arising from variation in research office capacity and interpretation, helping to ensure that applicants receive more consistent advice regardless of institution. While reliance on institutional support is a feature of all UKRI opportunities, improvements to clarity within the NIA help mitigate this effect.

Actions taken to increase positive impact or mitigate negative impact include:

- Clearer and more structured guidance within the funding opportunity and supporting web content
- Revised eligibility criteria aligned with current research contexts
- Explicit recognition of diverse and non-traditional career trajectories
- Use of inclusive and accessible language throughout the guidance
- Clearer expectations of the role of research organisations in supporting applicants.

Targeted communications will be undertaken to ensure the research community and research organisations are aware of the updates in the NIA scheme and how the changes may impact them and their career planning as well as the long-term position of the scheme. During this period, internal processes for grouping and assessing applications will ensure fair and consistent treatment regardless of which version of the opportunity is used.



Impact on protected characteristics

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

Protected characteristic	Impact (positive, negative, none or unknown)	Details of impact	Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact
Age	None.	Eligibility is based on indicators aligned to the aims of the opportunity (such as grant history and level of research independence), rather than age, years since graduation or length of experience. The updated guidance explicitly recognises diverse, non-traditional career paths and avoids age, years since graduation or length of experience.	Continue to emphasise criteria aligned to independence rather than age-based or time-based indicators in all communications.
Disability	Mixed - positive and negative.	Positive: clearer guidance supports applicants who may need additional preparation time or tailored support and reduces uncertainty. The revised eligibility thresholds may further benefit disabled researchers who may have required longer preparatory periods or early support before applying for independent funding. Potential negative: some applicants may still face barriers navigating the Funding Service or gaining research office support.	Maintain accessibility support routes; ensure guidance is clear and accessible and the changes are communicated well in advance; offer reasonable adjustments for review or panel processes where required; enable applicants to seek clarification via the Research Careers inbox. UKRI's webpages meet universal accessibility standards. If anyone needs accessibility support with TFS they can get in contact via email at: support@funding-service.ukri.org or call the UKRI Funding Service Helpline: +44 (0)1793 547 490.

		Potential negative: Individuals with some neurodivergent conditions may experience difficulties adapting to change. As a result, they may require additional time, clear communication, and tailored explanations to fully understand the updates to the NIA eligibility criteria and website content.	
Gender reassignment	None.	No barriers identified in scheme processes.	Continue to use inclusive language and ensure confidentiality in applicant data handling.
Marriage or civil partnership	None.	The scheme does not require relocation or travel and is not expected to impact individuals based on marital status.	None required.
Pregnancy and maternity	Mixed – positive and negative.	Potential negative: applicants on parental leave may have reduced opportunity to prepare proposals. Positive: long-standing application windows and emphasis on career stage assessment help mitigate this impact. The increased eligibility thresholds help mitigate impacts associated with extended early career support or delayed progression following parental leave. There is capability to flag confidential and sensitive information in the TFS application to EPSRC and follow up with details, such as that the applicant will be	Ensure application windows remain reasonable; encourage research offices to support applicants returning from leave. Ensure EPSRC staff are clear on the peer review processes available to support applicants availing of parental leave without penalty to their application.

		on parental leave and unable to partake in review responses for a particular time window.	
Race	Mixed – positive and negative.	Potential negative: underrepresentation of minoritised ethnic groups in EPSRC disciplines is a known issue; applicants with overseas or international funding histories may face additional complexity navigating UKRI funding terminology in demonstrating eligibility, which may intersect with a range of applicant backgrounds. Positive: updated guidance improves clarity and reduces uncertainty and risk of inconsistent advice	Maintain clear guidance; ensure supporting information reflects a range of applicant backgrounds. Continue monitoring patterns of application and eligibility queries. Enable applicants to seek clarification where needed.
Religion or belief	None.	No aspects of scheme operation disadvantages religious groups; deadlines are not linked to specific events, religious observance or travel.	Consider timing (time of day, time of year) if future webinars/events/panels are planned or introduced. EPSRC will endeavour to avoid days of religious significance to enable participation from people of different faiths. EPSRC will also endeavour to accommodate adjustments for religious practices. EPSRC will have a point of contact for people who need to discuss their specific requirements/queries.
Sex	Mixed – positive and negative.	Potential negative: women remain underrepresented in many EPSRC disciplines, and caring responsibilities disproportionately affect	Maintain awareness of disciplinary imbalances and continue monitoring diversity data.

		women. Revised eligibility thresholds may help mitigate gendered impacts of career breaks or prolonged early career support by allowing greater flexibility in qualifying experiences. Consideration is also given to the potential impact of menstrual health conditions and menopause, which may present similar challenges to those experienced by individuals with certain disabilities, particularly in relation to application preparation and participation in assessment processes. Positive: clearer guidance and expectations on institutional support and recognition of diverse career paths help mitigate this but cannot remove these systemic factors alone.	Continue to promote inclusive assessment practices. Ensure flexibility in processes where possible to support applicants experiencing health-related circumstances.
Sexual orientation	None.	No elements of the scheme affect individuals on the basis of sexual orientation.	Maintain inclusive language.

Where impacts are assessed as 'mixed', this reflects the interaction between scheme processes and broader structural inequalities in the research system, rather than new barriers introduced by the guidance update itself. The actions identified focus on mitigation within EPSRC's control.

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,	Details of impact	Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact
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	none or unknown)		
Geographical location and place	Mixed – positive and negative.	Applicants from smaller or less research-intensive institutions may experience disadvantage due to variation in research office support. While this is a broader feature across all funding opportunities, improved clarity within the NIA reduces reliance on local interpretation and mitigates inconsistencies.	Reinforce research office responsibilities; ensure applicants know where to seek advice by signposting support routes clearly.
Socio-economic status	Unknown.	There is limited direct evidence of impact. Applicants with fewer institutional resources may benefit from clearer guidance and support expectations.	Monitor application/award data; ensure communications avoid assumptions about existing institutional support.
Education background	Positive.	Emphasis on the core aims of the NIA (including strong research vision and approach) reduces undue reliance on institutional prestige or background.	Maintain clarity in assessment criteria.
Parent or guardian responsibilities	Negative (mitigated).	Applicants with childcare responsibilities may face constraints in preparing applications within fixed timeframes. Updated eligibility criteria reduce penalisation of applicants whose early careers have included extended support periods or career breaks, by avoiding reliance on age or time-based measures.	Keep application windows open for appropriate duration; encourage flexible institutional support.

Carer responsibilities	Negative (mitigated).	Similar challenges to those with childcare responsibilities.	Provide flexibility where possible; ensure guidance is explicit about career stage assessment and signpost available support.
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)	None.	The scheme involves no political activity or obligations.	None required.
Other characteristics	Mixed – positive and negative.	Applicants with overseas or international funding histories, or from different research systems, may face additional complexity in interpreting eligibility criteria and UKRI funding terminology. These challenges may be influenced by factors such as nationality and language and may affect confidence in determining eligibility.	Maintain clear, accessible and consistent guidance. Enable applicants to seek clarification via the Research Careers inbox to support consistent interpretation of eligibility.

Impacts may be aggravated for individuals with intersecting characteristics (for example, disabled applicants with caring responsibilities at less research-intensive institutions). The mitigations identified aim to address these combined barriers wherever possible.

Final decision

Make a decision on whether to proceed with the activity

Overall, the NIA opportunity, as delivered with updated guidance and eligibility criteria, is expected to have a positive (and at minimum neutral) impact on equality of opportunity and, therefore, the activity will proceed.

The scheme continues to support ECRs in establishing independence, with improvements to clarity and accessibility reducing unintended barriers to participation. Updates to eligibility thresholds ensure alignment with current research funding levels and practices, supporting access across a broader range of disciplines and career pathways.

While some groups may experience minor disadvantages linked to broader systemic factors (e.g. disciplinary underrepresentation, caring responsibilities), these are mitigated where possible through scheme design, clearer guidance and established EPSRC support mechanisms. No disproportionate or unmanageable risks arise from the updated guidance and opportunity.



The planned transition approach ensures that scheme delivery changes do not create a gap in access to funding or introduce unintended disadvantage during implementation.

Review and sign off

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

- Use of queries received via the Research Careers inbox to inform improvements to guidance where appropriate.
- Ongoing engagement with research offices and the research community regarding eligibility interpretations to improve consistency of advice.
- Review of this EIA ahead of any future substantive changes to scheme design or guidance.
- Tracking demographics and comparing against previous scheme.

What is the EIA review date?

07/02/2028

Contact

EPSRC Talent and Skills team

researchcareers@epsrc.ukri.org

Will the EIA be published?

Yes – to be published alongside the updated funding opportunity.

Who has this been signed off by?

Rachel Rothwell, Senior Portfolio Manager, 5th June 2026

Submitting the form

You need to [submit the form to the central repository](#)

EIAs for the International Science Partnership Funds should be emailed to: ISPF@ukri.org

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
		1	
		2	
		3	

Action plan

Add the actions you intend to take (or have taken) to address the negative impact you have identified. Actions should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound).

Action	Deadline	Owner	How will it be monitored?	What is the outcome?
Maintain clear explanatory guidance on eligibility	Before publication	EPSRC Talent and Skills	Internal review	Improved clarity and consistency of eligibility understanding
Review web content and supporting guidance	Before publication	EPSRC Talent and Skills	Research Careers inbox tracking	Improved clarity and consistency of applicant understanding
Engage research offices to improve consistency	Ongoing	EPSRC Talent and Skills	Research office query analysis.	Reduced ineligible submissions and positive feedback from research offices