



UK Research
and Innovation

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Equality Impact Assessment
Next Generation AI: Explainable AI



Overview of activity

	Response
Name of activity being assessed	Next Generation AI: Explainable AI
Council/department/project team	EPSRC – Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (AIR) Activity delivered as part of UKRI IS8 – AI Programme
Aims and objectives of the activity	We are investing up to £10 million over two years into speculative and high-risk fundamental research with the potential to deliver high reward by enabling a step change in the explainability of future systems. The opportunity aims to: • Support potentially transformative, highly novel, fundamental research with the potential to deliver a step change in the explainability of future AI systems, laying the foundations for societal, economic and technological benefits, including new market opportunities for the UK. • Strengthen the UK's capability to design, develop and deploy explainable AI technologies • Broaden access to strategic AI funding, particularly for new entrants and early- and mid-career researchers in the UK. • Deliver a faster process compared to current standard funding routes, whilst maintaining robust decision making that is proportionate to the level of risk. This is an EPSRC led call, funded via the AI IS8 programme. Funding will support ~20 small (≤£500,000) grants. We are taking a broad, problem-focused approach to remit in this funding opportunity and welcome proposals from a diverse range of research backgrounds, including mathematics, computer science, AI, and other relevant disciplines, and encourage applicants to explore how their expertise can contribute to advancing AI explainability.
Who is affected by your policy/funding activity/event?	• Applicants to the funding activity • EPSRC staff involved in the funding activity's delivery
What data and consultation have you used?	Stakeholder activities include: • Initial scoping with several members of the AI research community • Consultation with the EDI team

Commented [LU1]: Is this right? I think probably but just want to test the thinking

Commented [MU2R1]: Also "speculative" - this is the wording used by New Horizons, and I quite like that it is more descriptive than simply high-risk/high-reward.... What do you think though @Seb Doherty-Boyd EPSRC UKRI ?

Commented [SU3R1]: Looks good to me!



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|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal Discussions/Meetings with Senior Leadership Team and Team Head |
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Analysing your impact

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



Are there general or overarching impacts on multiple groups? What actions will you take to increase positive impact, or reduce/mitigate negative impact?	This opportunity will support research that works towards explainable AI. Although not an explicit objective, there is a potential for research funded through this call to have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics as explainable AI may enable more accessible AI systems. This opportunity will support projects at a relatively smaller scale than recent other opportunities run by the AI&R team, and we hope this will encourage those at early-mid- career stage to apply and therefore diversify our pool of current Project Leads. The opportunity will be open over the summer break and will therefore be open for longer than our minimum requirement (8 weeks) to mitigate for those who will have less time available over the summer break. Applications and reviews will have significantly lower word/page limits than usual in order to simplify the process and reduce workload, in particular for those reviewing applications. We will be employing distributed peer review for the assessment process in this call. This means all applicants will also be acting as peer reviewers. This has the potential for a negative impact as it will mean the PL will have a higher than normal workload. To mitigate for this to an extent, we are allowing one other member from the applicant team to act as a reviewer. Applications and reviews will have significantly lower word/page limits than usual in order to simplify the process and reduce workload. We will be holding a webinar where we will give potential applicants the opportunity to ask questions about the funding opportunity and the Distributed Peer Review process. We will also deliver reviewing guidance to applicants at this webinar. This guidance will cover issues including fairness, objectivity and unconscious bias. Peer reviewers will be required to evidence their views and scores. EPSRC staff will conduct usability checks on all peer review comments and where there is evidence of bias, or a reviewer has failed to provide evidence for their scores the review will be marked as 'unusable'. EPSRC staff members will be briefed on unconscious bias and empowered to constructively challenge potential bias where they identify it.
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Commented [SD4]: I am not sure the workload reduction is here as I imagine applicants wil agonise over fitting their ideas in a shorter application. Rather, I expect we will find this helps with the review process



	UKRI standard Grant Terms and Conditions comply with UK equality legislation and include provisions designed to mitigate against potential negative impacts (e.g. sick pay, parental and adoption leave, the possibility of part-time and flexible working, and grant extensions). Research Organisations are subject to equality legislation and have a duty to comply with it. RGC 8 states that 'The Research Organisation must assume full responsibility for staff funded from the grant and, in consequence, accept all duties owed to and responsibilities for these staff, including, without limitation, their terms and conditions of employment and their training and supervision, arising from the employer/employee relationship.' Universities are therefore required to make reasonable adjustments as required to support their staff. As this is a pilot, we will monitor whether we have achieved our aspirations around early/mid career research, including by carrying out a questionnaire to survey all applicants to the call. This will be done following the DPR process.
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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	☐	☒	Age may not be a robust indicator of a career-stage, but the assumption is that most early career researchers are at a formative stage of	Overarching mitigations described above



			their careers and are younger than more established researchers/academics.	Ensure use of a variety of different communication strategies, including social media, to ensure that our messages reach the widest possible target audience
Disability	☒	☐	This opportunity will support research that works towards explainable AI. Although not an explicit objective, there is a potential for research funded through this call to have a positive impact on those with disabilities as explainable AI may enable more accessible AI systems.	
Gender reassignment (Trans identity)	☐	☐		
Marriage or civil partnership	☐	☐		
Pregnancy and maternity	☐	☒	See overarching impacts	See overarching impacts
Race	☐	☐		
Religion or belief	☐	☐		
Sexual orientation	☐	☐		
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)	☒	☐	Improved geographical breadth of the EPSRC AI research portfolio is an objective of this activity.	We will work with the regional engagement team to advertise this opportunity widely.
Socio-economic status	☐	☐		
Education background	☐	☐		
Parent/guardian responsibilities	☐	☒	See overarching impacts	See overarching impacts
Carer/parent carer responsibilities	☐	☒	See overarching impacts	See overarching impacts
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)	☐	☐		
Other characteristics	☐	☐		



Continued below...

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.	☒	The activity has been adapted, as described in the overarching impacts section
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.	☐	

Continued below...

Review and sign off

What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the impact of your activity?	We will plan annual reviews of this EIA, including a reflection at the end of the activity. We will continue to consult with the groups affected by your activity and use new insights to review you EIA.
Next review date:	01/04/2027
Will this EIA be published? * Yes/Not required	Yes
Point of contact	Seb Doherty-Boyd Seb.Doherty-Boyd@epsrc.ukri.org
Signed off by (name and date):	Bethany Turner (Head of AI for Science), 09/07/26
Before publishing or archiving your EIA, please remove any sensitive or confidential information such as personal identifiable data. Once your EIA is completed or updated: 1. Upload it to the UKRI central repository via the EIA submission form EIAs for ODA and non-ODA ISPF programmes should be emailed to: ISPF@ukri.org	

Change log



Name	Date	Version	Change
		1	E.g. Based on input received from consultation groups at the business case stage, added actions under the gender section

Continued below...

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?
Work with the regional engagement team to advertise this opportunity widely.	30/06/2026	Seb Doherty-Boyd	Updated form published	Inform inclusive design of the activity
Continue to consult with the EDI team, the meta science team, external stakeholders and other relevant group while preparing to publish this opportunity	30/06/2026	Seb Doherty-Boyd	Updated form published	Inform inclusive design of the activity