

UK Research and Innovation Equality Impact Assessment Form

About your activity

Title of your activity

ESRC Applicant-led: Explore Awards

Council or business area

ESRC

Aims and objectives

Explore awards will support individuals or small teams to undertake ambitious, curiosity-driven social science that pushes disciplinary, methodological or conceptual boundaries, or otherwise generates important new understanding.

Applicants can be at any stage of their career. Applications must be submitted by an individual researcher or a small central research team consisting of no more than four members, comprising one Project Lead and up to three Project Co-Leads.

Applications can draw from the wider sciences but must be more than 50% within ESRC's remit.

Activities covered by this EIA include:

- Advertising the funding opportunity
- Application process
- Assessment process
- Moderation and decision-making process

Who is affected?

- Applicants and award holders
- Research Office staff in organisations eligible for UKRI funding
- External assessors and moderators
- ESRC staff managing the opportunity

What data and consultation have you used?

- Consultation with ESRC colleagues on the appropriateness of this EIA
- Previous consultations, outcomes or lessons learned from similar projects
- Previous EIAs within UKRI

Impact on specific groups

Are there general impacts on multiple groups?

ESRC is committed to go above and beyond complying with Equality legislation to ensure that our processes are as fair and equitable as they can be.

Eligibility criteria

- Applicants are eligible for funding regardless of whether they are established members of a recognised Research Organization (RO) or not. Applicants who are not established members of an RO must be formally supported by an RO which must confirm that appropriate facilities and support will be provided to carry out the research.
- Individual generic track record is not specifically assessed. Instead, applicant and team capability to deliver is assessed as a whole, with guidance specifically noting the importance of experience being relevant (appropriate to career stage) and focused on the balance of skills and experience to deliver the work proposed in the application, rather than generally. Applications use a Résumé for Research and Innovation (R4RI) document instead of individual CVs. This narrative document covers the whole team and allows applicants to showcase the range of skills relevant to the application and to provide additional context as appropriate.

Application Process (The Funding Service)

- Applications are made through UKRI's 'The Funding Service' (TFS). This EIA does not cover this service but notes that it complies with the latest accessibility requirements. The accessibility statement for the TFS can be found at [Accessibility statement for the UKRI Funding Service – UKRI](#)
- Bespoke guidance in The Funding Service has been reviewed to ensure wording is accessible as possible.

Assessor and moderator recruitment

- External assessors are appointed based on relevant expertise. Selection aims to ensure where possible diversity of career status/stage and institutional representation.
- Moderating panel members are appointed, first and foremost, based on relevant expertise. Our shortlisting process looks only at expertise/fit to vacancy and track record. We do not know the ethnicity/race, disability status or other protected characteristics for applicants as equal opportunities monitoring forms are detached from the applications and remain anonymous.

- We aim to ensure that the composition of panels is diverse, considering a balance of gender and geography (to ensure UK-wide representation) and seeking to ensure a diversity of career stage and institutions. We will only make recruitment decisions which compromise diversity when it is objectively justified by the necessity to ensure the required breadth of subject expertise with high-quality candidates.
- Following each round of panel recruitment, we look at panel composition by race/ethnicity and disability status and consider if we need to take additional action. We do not impose quotas.

Assessment and moderation process

- All assessors receive guidance covering key principles, including fairness, objectivity and the mitigation of unconscious bias.
- Case Officers play a particularly important role in ensuring consistency and fairness and will read assessor comments to check that they adhere closely to the published scoring criteria and definitions.
- Moderating panel members will be briefed on unconscious bias and encouraged to feel empowered to constructively challenge potential bias where they identify it. ESRC staff are also able to challenge bias if identified at other stages of the assessment process.

Standard Terms and Conditions

- 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 Research Organisations are wholly responsible for staff funded from the Grant, including Research Fellows, and 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.

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	Potential negative	It is often assumed that early career researchers are younger than more experienced peers. Care should be taken to avoid conflation between an applicant's age, their experience and their career stage.	No reference will be made to age in opportunity documentation. Emphasis within documentation is on team capability to deliver, rather than on duration of individual researcher experience. See section above regarding general impacts, in relation to mitigations against unconscious bias. To note that assessors and moderators will also be appointed based on their expertise, without restriction on age.
Disability	Potential negative	Individuals with visible and non-visible disabilities may be impacted at various stages of the commissioning process (potential applicants, assessors and ESRC staff). Applicants may face difficulties with accessibility during the application process. Individuals with disabilities may have difficulty attending panel meetings in person. Individuals with neuro-disabilities may experience difficulties with concentration and focus during panel meetings.	See also above, regarding general impacts. Information about the opportunity will be shared in advance of launch via the preannouncement on the UKRI website and a virtual Town Hall meeting. The meeting will be recorded and made available after the event. The Funding Service is compliant with relevant accessibility standards for RO staff and applicants. Applicants will be signposted to Disability and accessibility support for UKRI applicants and grant holders – UKRI, which provides guidance and practical support throughout the funding lifecycle. The opportunity is always open and applications are assessed on a rolling basis, so applicants are not constrained by a short submission window.

			Both applicants and those involved in the assessment process will be given the opportunity to confidentially disclose any reasonable adjustments required to support their full participation in the process. Requests will be handled sensitively and in confidence, with reasonable adjustments implemented wherever appropriate and feasible to remove barriers to engagement. We will take steps to ensure that all digital guidance relating to the application and assessment processes are accessible and inclusive. This includes adherence to recognised digital accessibility standards and best practice. Considerations include, but are not limited to: • Ensuring all digital materials meet recognised accessibility standards, enabling equal access for all users. • Ensuring staff have sufficient EDI training to be able to respond effectively to requirements of all applicants and assessors. Most panel meetings will be held virtually. If an in-person meeting is scheduled, members will be able to join remotely where necessary. Online meeting platforms offer an accessible and inclusive environment for participants. Depending on the needs identified, considerations might include: • Enabling the chat function and closed captioning, and adjusting volume, to support
--	--	--	--

			those with hearing requirements. - Where there are particular constraints consider opportunities for participants to engage in a different way (e.g., teleconference). - Considering the length of meetings and ensuring that sufficient breaks are built into the agenda. Where used, we will try to ensure that venues offer an accessible and inclusive environment for participants.
Gender reassignment	None	No specific impacts anticipated. Data is collected as part of the application process, but applicants are given the option not to disclose gender identity.	Gender-neutral inclusive language will be utilised where possible in all documents. Both applicants and those involved in the assessment process will be given the opportunity to confidentially disclose any reasonable adjustments required to support their full participation in the process. Requests will be handled sensitively and in confidence, with reasonable adjustments implemented wherever appropriate and feasible to remove barriers to engagement. Panel members will be offered the opportunity to share their preferred pronouns if they wish to do so at the beginning of the meeting and will be reminded to be respectful of other panel members' choices and to use gender neutral language where possible.
Marriage or civil partnership	None	No specific impacts anticipated.	n/a

		Applicants are not asked at any point in the application to disclose their civil status.	
Pregnancy and maternity	Potential negative	Application submission or application assessment may be affected by parental leave. Award holders may need to take parental leave during the course of a grant. Limits to core team size for Explore could be perceived as a potential negative impact regarding this characteristic.	The opportunity is always open and applications are assessed on a rolling basis. Applicants may choose the timing of submission that best suits their circumstances. Applicants will be given the opportunity to confidentially disclose any reasonable adjustments required to support their full participation in the process. Requests will be handled sensitively and in confidence, with reasonable adjustments implemented wherever appropriate and feasible to remove barriers to engagement. Assessors and panel members will be made aware of requirements when appointed, enabling them to plan appropriately and make any necessary arrangements to support participation. There will be flexibility to accommodate caring responsibilities (including childcare), health needs or other personal circumstances where required. Provision for parental leave is covered in UKRI terms and conditions.
Race	Potential negative	Applicants are not asked to disclose their race. However, there is potential risk of bias during assessment against an applicant based on name and perceived race.	See section above regarding general impacts, in relation to mitigations against unconscious bias. Expert reviews referencing the race of the applicant or displaying bias will be marked as 'Unusable'.
Religion or belief	Potential negative	There could be potential discrimination because it is known that somebody (a	See section above regarding general impacts, in relation to mitigations against unconscious bias.

		panel member, a research applicant or research participants) has a particular faith or belief. Scheduling of assessor and panel requirements may disadvantage some religious groups, as religious holidays or practices may present a barrier to participation.	We will ensure religious observances are appropriately considered when scheduling assessment periods and panel meetings, to support inclusive participation for all members. This may include: • Avoiding requirement for assessments and meetings during major religious festivals and holy days, where possible. • Allowing prayer breaks during panel meetings if requested. • If meeting in person, any dietary requirements or seating arrangements. Panel members will be given the opportunity to confidentially disclose any reasonable adjustments required to support their full participation in the process.
Sex	Potential negative	Potential for discrimination where it is known somebody has a particular sex. Use of language can be a barrier to participation. Certain words in the opportunity text may be perceived as being associated with masculine-coded traits (for example boldness, risk-taking), which could reduce perceived inclusivity for some applicants, and may interact with gender stereotypes during the assessment process.	See section above regarding general impacts, in relation to mitigations against unconscious bias. Gender-neutral, inclusive and balanced language will be used consistently across all documentation, including call specifications, applicant guidance, assessment criteria, and panel material. Opportunity guidance and assessment criteria will use a range of descriptors (for example bold, innovative, creative, ambitious) to encourage ambitious applications from the broadest possible community of researchers.

		Caring responsibilities can disproportionately fall on women, affecting application preparation or panel meeting attendance.	The opportunity is always open and applications are assessed on a rolling basis. Applicants may choose the timing that best suits their circumstances. For in-person panel meetings, reimbursement of additional childcare costs will be permitted if the meeting participant is otherwise unable to attend (this could include childcare at the venue, additional hours of childcare in the child's usual setting or paying for a relative to travel to care for school age children). We will ensure that there is balanced gender representation within moderation, where possible, taking a proactive approach to achieving diversity across gender identities.
Sexual orientation	None	No specific impacts anticipated. Applicants are not asked to disclose their sexual orientation.	Ensure materials are LGBTQ+ inclusive, reflecting respect for diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions.

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	Potential negative	Potential reviewer bias based on university ranking or location.	See section above regarding general impacts, in relation to mitigations against unconscious bias.

		Panel members may find it difficult to attend in-person meetings if located far from where they live.	Reviews displaying bias based on university ranking or location will be marked as 'Unusable'. Panels are balanced as far as possible (within the constraints of quality and appropriateness), to provide a good geographical spread of panel members across the four nations of the UK. Panel meetings are held primarily virtually or occasionally in person. For in-person panel meetings consideration will be given to meeting times, and travel costs will be reimbursed, in order to facilitate participation. Events will also be recorded and shared to make the information accessible for those who cannot attend.
Socio-economic status	None	Participants in all activities proposed for this opportunity will not incur any expenses.	Applicants are expected to apply through a Research Organisation - institutional support will help to remove many potential accessibility barriers.
Education background	Potential negative	Potential for reviewer bias based on whatever is disclosed in the application about applicants' educational backgrounds. Potential difficulties in understanding jargon/language used by assessors from a different background, outside of academia or in a different discipline.	See section above regarding general impacts, in relation to mitigations against unconscious bias. Reviews displaying bias based on educational background will be marked as 'Unusable'. We will ensure that unnecessary jargon and/or academic language are not used, to prevent potential barriers to understanding.
Parent, guardian and caring responsibilities	Potential negative	Caring responsibilities could be a barrier to application	The opportunity is always open and applications are assessed on a rolling basis. Applicants may

		submission or application assessment. The small core team size of Explore may disadvantage those working part-time due to caring responsibilities during team selection.	choose the timing of submission that best suits their circumstances. The costs of additional childcare for grant holders, beyond that required to meet the normal contracted requirements of the job, and that are directly related to the project, may be requested as a directly incurred cost if the institutional policy is to reimburse them. However, childcare costs associated with normal working patterns may not be sought. Assessors and panel members will be made aware of requirements when appointed, enabling them to plan appropriately and make any necessary arrangements to support participation. There will be flexibility to accommodate caring responsibilities (including childcare), health needs or other personal circumstances where required.
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)	None	No specific impacts anticipated.	n/a
Other characteristics		Avoid the assumption that everyone has equal access to technological devices and internet.	All assessors will be asked to highlight any personal circumstances that may require additional support or reasonable adjustments. Where possible, alternative formats for information will be considered. Applicants and assessors are expected to seek assistance from their Research Organisations if they experience difficulties related to technological access.



--	--	--	--

Final decision

Make a decision on whether to proceed with the activity

State which one of the following outcomes applies and give a reason for your decision.

1. No negative or positive impact identified therefore, activity will proceed
- 2. Adapt or change the activity in a way which will eliminate negative impact or promote equality**

The mitigations outlined in this document will enable the opportunity to adapt where needed to overcome barriers to accessibility and eliminate potential bias.

3. Stop the activity because the evidence shows bias or negative impact towards one or more groups.
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?

This EIA will be monitored on an annual basis during the management of the funding opportunity. Responsibility for this will rest with the Opportunity Delivery Manager.

What is the EIA review date?

May 2027

Contact

Enquiries about this equality impact assessment or the Explore funding opportunity can be sent to explore@esrc.ukri.org

Will the EIA be published?

Yes

Who has this been signed off by?

Jen Gold, Executive Director of Research at ESRC, 14/08/2026

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?



UK Research
and Innovation
