

UK Research and Innovation Equality Impact Assessment Form

About your activity

Title of your activity

Funding opportunity: experimental medicine to define mechanisms of gambling disorder.

Council or business area

Medical Research Council

Aims and objectives

On behalf of the UKRI Research Programmes on Gambling (RPG), MRC is launching a funding opportunity that aims to support academically led experimental medicine projects that are conducted in living humans. The projects should be based round a clearly articulated gap in our understanding of gambling disorder and include clear measurable clinical, behavioural, cognitive or neurobiological outcomes to investigate causal biological, cognitive or psychosocial mechanisms. Although not primarily aimed at discovering new treatments, the approach should have clear path to clinical impact in treatment or prevention of gambling-related harms, including policy changes.

This EIA will consider equality as part of advertising; application process; assessment process, including building a panel and hosting panel meetings; post-award monitoring and support for this opportunity.

Who is affected?

MRC staff, applicants, research office staff within organisations eligible for UKRI funding, expert reviewers, panel members, research participants (i.e., human volunteers recruited to the proposed studies), people with lived experience, the wider research community

What data and consultation have you used?

Give details of the evidence you've used, for example, survey results, UKRI reports, external data, legal precedents

- Previous EIAs within UKRI
- UKRI diversity data – Tableau dashboards



Impact on specific groups

Are there general impacts on multiple groups?

General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Considerations

MRC's research commissioning processes are designed with fairness in mind. MRC is committed to achieving equality of opportunity for all funding, board/panel and scheme applicants and aims to create an inclusive environment that encourages excellence in research through good equalities practice.

Diversity is one of the core MRC values, and we are working to ensure that the ways in which we fund embrace a diversity of thought, people, geographical locations and ideas. Read about our [current initiatives](#).

Panel membership and meetings

- Whilst panel members are appointed first and foremost based on expertise, we aim to select diverse panels. Final decisions take into account trying to balance the membership by gender, ethnicity and geography and seek to ensure a diversity of career stage and organisations.
- Panel membership aims to reflect the community they represent, and gender / ethnicity targets are currently in place.
- All panel members are given opportunities to inform staff if they have any additional needs to enable attendance or participation (e.g. reasonable adjustments, flexibility etc.), including virtual attendance as appropriate. This could also include further issues that come up at any point.
- All panel members receive guidance and training as part of the panel briefing/induction which covers good practice in safeguarding decision-making (e.g. fairness, objectivity and bias awareness) and equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Panel members are reminded that meetings should be conducted inclusively and equitably, allowing everyone to be recognised and ensuring that everyone feels empowered to speak and participate meaningfully.

Funding application assessment process

- Standard MRC policies will be followed in assessment and delivery of this opportunity and resulting funding.
- Expert reviewers, patient/ public reviewers and panel members are instructed to assess the application in front of them and not to 'read between the lines' or give the benefit of the doubt based on the reputation of the individual or team, as this would be a form of confirmation bias.
- For each application at stage one and two, three academic panel introducers are appointed who formally assess the applications with all panel members then asked to participate in discussions to ensure that an open and transparent assessment process is undertaken, and a diverse range of views is represented.
- Protected characteristics of applicants will not be directly disclosed to the panel to minimise the risk of conscious and unconscious bias.



- UKRI has significantly broadened the range of research and innovation roles eligible to apply for funding, including as application leads, to reduce systemic bias and foster a more inclusive research culture.
- Applicants invited to interview have the opportunity to provide written comments ahead of the interview meeting and are given opportunities to inform staff if they have any additional needs to enable attendance or participation (e.g. reasonable adjustments, flexibility etc.), including virtual attendance as appropriate. This could also include further issues that come up at any point.

Safeguarding decision-making and bias mitigation

- Staff and panel members play a pivotal role in managing bias in meetings and in creating optimal conditions for fair and objective decision making.
- Guidance on good decision making is provided for all panel members at the panel briefing/induction and the principles are reinforced at the start of each meeting.
- All panel members receive a [“Guide for Board/Panel Members to Managing Bias in Peer Review”](#) which should be read in conjunction with the guidance on good decision-making.
- Unconscious bias briefings are held at the start of each meeting.
- All MRC staff receive Active Bystander Training.
- MRC staff work closely with the panel chair(s) to agree approaches that are designed to minimise opportunities for bias and improve transparency of the decision-making process. This includes managing environmental conditions, such as providing appropriate breaks.
- Panel members and MRC staff and associates are empowered to constructively challenge potential bias where they identify it.
- Panel members are bound by the UKRI [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#). All members should ensure that they avoid any bias in the assessment of applications because of the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation or because of any other relevant factor. Comments in writing and during meeting discussion must not contravene this policy.

Participation

- Travel and subsistence and additional child-care costs for attendance at meetings can be reclaimed in accordance with the [UKRI Travel and Subsistence Policy](#).
- The stage one meeting will be conducted in-person, and the interview panel meeting with hybrid options, enabling broader participation, for example from those with certain disabilities or parental and caring responsibilities. This applies to panel members, as well as applicants invited to interview.
- Where any activities involve in-person events, the [EDI event planning checklist](#) will be used to ensure impacts are considered across diverse characteristics (e.g. in relation to accessibility for disability etc.).
- Panel meeting dates are publicised in advance to allow potential attendees to make arrangements to attend, seeking to avoid school and religious holidays.

MRC flexible working practices

- MRC provides flexibility in its range of awards that can help support researchers if they are taking or have taken time off for a career break, maternity or paternity leave, sickness or for other reasons. For further information, please see [here](#).
- Career breaks or disruption can be identified and will be accepted by the Panel without a requirement for detail or justification.
- Extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis and approved where flexibility is possible and appropriate justification is provided.

Potential overarching adverse impacts:

- Progression from early- to mid- research career stages is lowest for women, those with disability, black and minority ethnic workers and those from lowest socio-economic backgrounds (<https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/diversity-in-science/uk-scientific-workforce-report/>). Therefore, the leadership experience required for leading a successful award supported by this funding opportunity may disproportionately and/or unequally disadvantage these groups. This risk is tolerated for the current funding opportunity due to the stipulation of the application leadership team to be diverse and for the team to be inclusive, diverse, and creative.

Potential overarching beneficial impacts:

- Funding will support academically led experimental medicine studies in gambling addiction and related harms across the UK, including for researchers with diverse backgrounds and career stages.
- The opportunity and successful applications will highlight a range of contributions and support varied ways of working, while also promoting recognition of researchers' career development and the commitment of technical staff.

Research participants are human volunteers that are recruited to the successful studies. This is a separate process to the funding decision-making process and is conducted by the research organisation's in which the research will take place. UKRI expert and panel reviewers will consider the ethical considerations as part of the assessment process; however, this is the responsibility of the awarded research organisation to undertake ethical approval before studies can start. UKRI are kept informed and will not release funding if ethical approval for the awarded studies is not obtained. It is acknowledged that gambling participation and harm are unevenly distributed across different population groups and that inclusive recruitment of human participants should avoid systematic under-representation of groups disproportionately experiencing harm.

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,	Details of impact	Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact

	none or unknown)		
Age	Negative	This funding call might favour more experienced applicants and panel members. Older patient/public contributors may be more likely to review applications. Gambling participation is highest among those aged 45 to 64. Perceptions of older and younger people can be influenced by stereotypes which may impact behaviours and decision making towards them. For instance, there might be an age bias whereby it is assumed that an Early Career Researcher is younger.	Applicants of any age are welcome to apply, and we will encourage participation of early career researchers in the applicant team e.g., applying as a new investigator. The application will be judged on the capability to deliver and not on individual applicants. Consistently, several team members will be invited to the panel interviews providing opportunities for early career researchers in the applicant teams. We will consider including early career researchers in the assessment panel as appropriate. Public and patient contributors of any age will be invited to review applications. This opportunity aligns with UKRI's eligibility requirements. Application and assessment criteria have been designed to be inclusive with respect to career stage.
Disability	Negative	MRC has very limited data for disability awarding rate and it is often not disclosed. However, it is clear that disabled people are under-represented within research funding and across scientific research and innovation careers more broadly and face additional barriers to achieving success within academic pathways. There could be potential discrimination against an	Reasonable adjustment costs will be considered separately to overall grant costings to ensure disabled applicants and team members are not disadvantaged. Applicants have the opportunity to consider mitigation measures within their proposals and discuss reasonable adjustments with MRC staff. All public/patient and panel members and applicants have the opportunity to discuss any reasonable adjustments they may need to be able to fully participate in the assessment and

		applicant due to their perceived or actual disability. Potential applicants and assessors (public/patient/scientific) with disabilities may encounter difficulties during the activities associated with applying for the funding opportunity and as part of assessment and panel meetings. Disability may impact projects based on the focus of individual activities within the proposal as well as costs. Individuals who are neuro-diverse may experience difficulties with concentration and focus during panel assessments. Meeting rooms may not be accessible enough for disabled individuals attending panel meetings in person.	panel meetings (both in person and virtually). Website promotion will be accessible and compatible with the range of specialist hardware and software as per UKRI standard (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines). Generally, PDF documents are not considered to be accessible and will not be the only available format on the website. An applicant webinar will be recorded and published online, including speaker transcript. Closed captions can be utilised in Teams meetings for those with hearing impairments. Panel meetings will take place virtually or be conducted hybrid, and so will not require panel members with disabilities to travel to a meeting. Those conducted in person will ensure venues are accessible. We will offer the option to keep one's camera off and blur the background to reduce distractions, which may help individuals who feel uncomfortable in the online space. MRC Office have capability to extend review deadlines to accommodate responsibilities. Psychological support for patient and public reviewers will be available throughout the duration of their involvement in the funding process. Information on disability and accessibility support for UKRI applicants and grant holders has been included in the Funding Finder page.
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Gender reassignment	Negative	Data is not held within UKRI in relation to gender reassignment. However, it is generally known that LGBTQ+ people are under-represented within research funding and across scientific research and innovation careers more broadly and face additional barriers to achieving success within academic pathways. A person's name/title may be used incorrectly, or suitable options are not available on funding opportunity documents. Venues for in-person panel meetings may not have gender-neutral toilets. Individuals undergoing gender reassignment could face interruptions to their participation in panels or submitting applications where they may need to undergo medical treatments etc.	Gender neutral language will be utilised across all documentation. Effort will be made to secure venues with gender-neutral toilet options. Panel members, public/ patient reviewers and applicants being interviewed will be asked if they want to provide their preferred pronouns for panel meeting attendance list/name tags etc. MRC Office have capability to extend review deadlines to accommodate responsibilities. We will provide panel members with guidance on fair and objective assessment. Panel members and UKRI staff will safeguard the integrity of the assessment process by watching for bias and raising any concerns. UKRI terms and conditions are flexible in nature and allow for absence as a result of medical treatment. We would expect that absence related to transition would be covered by the Research Organisation's absence policy and strongly encourage ROs to treat absence relating to transition like any other medical absence.
Marriage or civil partnership	None	This status is not known to either funders or panellists and should have no impact.	
Pregnancy and maternity	Positive and negative	Positive MRC provides flexibility in its range of awards that can help support researchers if they are taking or have taken time off for a career break, maternity or paternity leave, sickness or for other reasons. For further	The opportunity will be announced in August 2026. There will be a recorded applicant information session in October 2026. The opportunity will open in October 2026 and close in April 2027. The opportunity closing date will fall outside of UK school holidays and term breaks.

		information, please see here. Negative Completion of application or project may be affected by maternity, paternity or parental leave and leave related to surrogacy and adoption. Childcare responsibilities may be a barrier to attending panel meetings. Individuals may not be able to travel to in-person panel meetings due to stage of pregnancy and symptoms.	Effort will be made to ensure in-person venues for panel meetings have facilities to accommodate breastfeeding and baby changing, or rooms are booked to accommodate. The application will be judged on the team cohesion and not on individual applicants. Consistently, several team members will be invited to the panel interviews providing flexibility for team members that are pregnant and/or on maternity, paternity or parental leave and leave related to surrogacy and adoption. Applicants are not asked to disclose pregnancy at any stage of the application. MRC Office have capability to extend review deadlines to accommodate responsibilities. 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 by the institution or project. For panel meetings, we will schedule regular breaks, including for breastfeeding/expressing if required. We will provide panel members with guidance regarding the assessment of career breaks within applications.
Race	Negative	UKRI diversity data for applicants and awardees shows that inequalities exist in awarding rates between applicants who identify as White (higher success rates) compared to applicants who identify as being from a minority	An ethnicity target of 24% was set to improve representation across all boards and panels. However, some panels may not have representation of minority ethnic individuals due to specific circumstances.

		ethnic group (lower success rates). This is particularly the case for Black applicants. Minority ethnic researchers are generally under-represented within MRC board and panel membership, and this also varies by individual boards and panels. There may not be representation of minority ethnic individuals on the panel for this funding opportunity. It is known that people from minority ethnic groups are under-represented within research funding and across scientific research and innovation careers more broadly and face additional barriers to achieving success within academic pathways. There may not be enough applications received from minority ethnic applicants. There could be potential discrimination against a panel member, public/patient contributor or applicant due to their perceived or actual race/ethnicity as the process is not anonymous and names are present.	For wide outreach, including to minority ethnic applicants, the funding opportunity will be pre-announced and widely advertised on social media channels. An applicant information webinar will be held in October 2026. We will address unconscious bias by ensuring that the selection criteria used are objective, transparent and robust; providing guidance and reminding all assessors about not bringing in personal biases; and providing a panel briefing in objective decision making. We will ensure that, within the constraints of quality and appropriateness, a diverse panel is recruited. We will encourage panel participants to share names and pronunciation during introductions. For successful applications, UKRI would expect any successful investments to ensure the use of inclusive practices in all of its operations.
Religion or belief	Negative	Data is not held within UKRI or MRC in relation to religion or belief. Religion or belief will not be considered as part of the eligibility criteria, so	Deadlines for funding opportunities as well as times for panel meetings will be held outside of larger religious events as far as possible.

		applicants of any religion or belief are welcome to apply. Religious holidays or practices may present a barrier to attending panel meetings.	Effort will be made to secure venues for panel meetings with private or designated spaces for people to use for short periods, including for example for religious practices; or rooms will be booked to support this as required.
Sex	Negative	UKRI diversity data for applicants and awardees shows that overall representation of female grant holders is below benchmark for the wider population for research grant applicants but above benchmark for fellowships. Women also tend to receive lower award amounts than men. It is known that women are under-represented within research funding and across scientific research and innovation careers more broadly and face additional barriers to achieving success within academic pathways. Female researchers are also under-represented within MRC board and panel membership, and this varies by individual boards and panels. There could be potential discrimination against an applicant due to their perceived or actual sex as the process is not anonymous and names are present.	A variable gender target has been set year on year (42% in 2024, with the ultimate aim of 50%) to improve representation of women across all boards and panels. A similar target will be aspired for the panel of this funding opportunity, including equal gender representation by the two co-chairs. The application will be judged on the team cohesion and not on individual applicants. Consistently, several team members will be invited to the panel interviews providing opportunities for diverse gender representations in the applicant leadership teams. Public and patient contributors, irrespective of sex or gender, will be invited to participate in the assessment of applications. We will keep the call open a long as possible to give applicants enough time to prepare proposals. We will ensure use of gender-neutral language in opportunity specification and guidance. We will ensure that, within the constraints of quality and appropriateness, a diverse panel is recruited to avoid single sex panels. We will provide guidance to panel members with regard to the



		Caring responsibilities may have direct and indirect impact on sex as a protected characteristic. People with caring responsibilities (which falls disproportionately on women) may have less time to prepare a proposal or attend a panel meeting. A higher proportion of males than females report recent gambling. Therefore, there may be representation from public/patient contributors that reflect these proportions.	assessment of career breaks within applications. We will provide panel members with guidance on fair and objective assessment. Panel members and UKRI staff will safeguard the integrity of the assessment process by watching for bias and raising any concerns.
Sexual orientation	Negative	Data is not held within UKRI or MRC in relation to sexual orientation. However, in general LGBTQ+ people are under-represented within research funding and across scientific research and innovation careers more broadly and face additional barriers to achieving success within academic pathways.	See General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Considerations above.

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	Negative	Research projects may involve researchers or partners in countries with different regulatory environments for gambling.	UKRI is committed to effective international collaboration, ensuring that it takes place with integrity and within strong ethical frameworks. The trusted research and innovation principles set out our expectations of UKRI-funded organisations in relation to due diligence for international collaboration. This is a UK wide opportunity.
Socio-economic status	Negative	People in STEM occupations are more likely to come from high or middle socio-economic backgrounds. The socio-economic status of applicants will vary depending on career stage, academic or support position, etc. Data will not be collected on this, and balanced representation may therefore be lacking amongst applicants.	Socio-economic status will not be disclosed and bias therefore unlikely in assessment process. Opportunity will be widely advertised to reach the full breadth of interested applicants across diverse socio-economic status.
Education background	Negative	Reputational bias sometimes arises depending on the universities an applicant attended.	Applicants are asked to provide their and their team's capability to deliver using R4RI module headings. This allows to show evidence of a wider range of skills and experience and does not require inclusion of education background.
Parent or guardian responsibilities	Positive and Negative	Positive MRC flexible working practices Negative Completion of application or project may be affected by	See also General Equality and Diversity Considerations below. Opportunity will stay open for 6 months and will be preannounced ahead of the opening date.

		parent/guardian responsibilities. Childcare responsibilities may be a barrier to attending panel meetings.	Opportunity closing date will fall outside UK school holidays and term breaks. Applicants are not asked to disclose parent/guardian status at any point. The application will be judged on the team cohesion and not on individual applicants. Consistently, several team members will be invited to the panel interviews providing flexibility for team members with parent/guardian responsibilities. MRC Office have capability to extend review deadlines to accommodate parent/guardian responsibilities. Provision for parental leave (including maternity leave, paternity leave and leave related to surrogacy and adoption) are covered in the UKRI terms and conditions. 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 by the institution or project.
Carer responsibilities	Positive and negative	Positive MRC flexible working practices Negative Completion of application or project may be affected by carer responsibilities. Caring responsibilities may be a barrier to attending panel meetings.	Opportunity will stay open for 6 months and will be preannounced ahead of the opening date. The application will be judged on the team cohesion and not on individual applicants. Consistently, several team



			members will be invited to the panel interviews providing flexibility for team members with carer responsibilities. Applicants are not asked to disclose carer status at any point. MRC Office have capability to extend review deadlines to accommodate carer responsibilities.
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)			
Other characteristics			

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
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?

For example, by planning regular reviews of the EIA, consulting with affected groups

- Plan regular reviews of the EIA – after each panel meeting and as part of closure or lessons learned activity
- Consult with panel members and public/patient contributors
- Consider applicant feedback from the application process

What is the EIA review date?

- June 2027 – after Stage 1 panel meeting to adjust ahead of Stage 2 process
- December 2027 – after Stage 2 panel meeting
- April 2028 – Lessons learned activity after funding of awards

Contact

gamblingexpmed@mrc.ukri.org

Will the EIA be published?

EIAs should be published alongside relevant funding activities for example funding opportunities and events – Yes

Who has this been signed off by?

Jaideep Gupte, SRO for the Research Programme on Gambling

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	
Bethan Davies		2	Amendments after review by Jaideep Gupte to reflect importance of inclusive recruitment of human participants to studies, explanation between the panel decision-making process and the awarded research organisation's responsibilities for obtaining ethical review of studies.
		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?
Ensure that opportunity call text clarifies and reflects the	4 th September 2026	Bethan Davies	Iterative review of the call text by UKRI line management and Research Programme on Gambling programme board.	Call text indicates UKRI commitment to EDI and applicants and those involved in the research are reassured that the



				processes are inclusive and equitable.
To update the application assessment webpages to ensure our assessment processes are clear and transparent	April 2027	MRC Peer Review team	Monthly progress updates on draft, review, approval and publication. Monitoring applicant enquiries to identify recurring questions or areas of confusion.	Clear and transparent information on the application assessment process and clarity on where equitable flexibility is possible to accommodate individual needs and circumstances.