

UK Research and Innovation Equality Impact Assessment Form

About your activity

Title of your activity

Collaboration for a Sustainable Future: pilots & UK seed funding

Council or business area

Research England

Aims and objectives

The Research England Collaboration for a Sustainable Future (CSF) Programme sets out to identify barriers and opportunities to institutional collaboration within the research and innovation system for a sustainable cost-effective future. The CSF programme will help us identify where Research England could deliver interventions that make the most difference for sustained joint working.

Through this funding opportunity within the CSF programme, we are seeking to support:

- funding of around £4,000,000 for pilot projects between £100,000 and £1,000,000 million up to 24 months led by eligible English universities. Projects will test new collaborations and models which drive efficiency and cost effectiveness of the research and innovation system to support a transition toward sector sustainability, shared capability and collective contribution to national priorities
- funding of £15,000,000 for seed funding of between £1 million and £5 million for up to 36 months for UK universities to support ambitious cross-UK innovation partnerships. Projects will bring together complementary strengths from innovation systems within self-defined geographical areas across the UK to drive economic growth and generate wider benefits to deliver more than the sum of its parts.

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) covers the funding opportunity for the pilots & UK seed funding with a total amount of £19 million available across this funding opportunity for the two elements: £4 million for England-only pilots, and £15 million for cross-UK innovation partnerships seed funding

There is a parallel funding opportunity to enable coordinating groups to deliver a published output(s) identifying the barriers, challenges and creating potential solutions to structured and

strategic institutional collaboration for a sustainable cost-effective future, which can be found through UKRI's funding finder.

Activities covered by this EIA include:

- Advertisement and application submission process
- Assessment process
- Operation of awards funded under the funding opportunity.

Who is affected?

- Applicants and participants, including Higher Education Providers (HEPs), research organisations, learned societies, representative bodies, charities, businesses, public sector organisations, community organisations, and other stakeholders with relevant expertise who may participate directly or indirectly in the funding opportunity.
- Individuals involved in funded or participating organisations, including professional services, organisational leaders, partners and collaborators.
- Groups and communities represented through engagement activities.
- HEPs and the wider research and innovation sector, who may benefit indirectly from the testing of new collaborative approaches through pilot activity, and any future actions informed by programme findings.
- Research England and UKRI staff, particularly those responsible for the design, delivery, and management of the funding opportunity and associated programme activities.

What data and consultation have you used?

This EIA has been informed by relevant Research England and UKRI policy documentation, previous EIA's, and internal learning from comparable funding opportunities.

This funding opportunity is part of the Collaboration for a Sustainable Future (CSF) programme and seeks to test new collaborations and bring together complementary strengths from innovation systems within self-defined geographical areas for a cost-effective sustainable future. As such this opportunity will generate evidence to help us identify where Research England could deliver longer-term interventions that make the most difference for sustained joint working.

Impact on specific groups

Are there general impacts on multiple groups?

Yes. There are potential overarching impacts that may affect multiple groups. These impacts relate primarily to awareness of opportunities, accessibility of engagement and funding processes, capacity to participate, representation within the evidence and decision-making processes.

Potential impacts include:

- Barriers to access where guidance, application processes or engagement materials are unclear, overly complex or burdensome, or rely on informal networks.
- Unequal participation if opportunities disproportionately attract well-established or highly resourced organisations.
- Indirect exclusion where engagement activities, communication methods or application processes are not sufficiently accessible or rely on inflexible working practices.
- Positive impacts through open and transparent engagement and funding opportunities, which may broaden participation, increase the diversity of perspectives informing programme outputs, and create opportunities for a wider range of individuals and groups to contribute to the development of future collaborative approaches.

To maximise positive impacts and mitigate potential risks, Research England will:

- Publish clear, accessible and proportionate guidance, eligibility criteria and assessment criteria.
- Use open and transparent processes rather than invitation-only approaches wherever appropriate.
- Promote opportunities through a range of channels to reach diverse stakeholders and communities.
- Provide proportionate application requirements and reasonable timescales to support participation from individuals and groups with differing levels of capacity and resource.
- Consider accessibility requirements for engagement activities, events and communications, and make reasonable adjustments where required.
- Embed equality, diversity and inclusion considerations within programme design, assessment, monitoring and evaluation processes.

There is also a potential risk that the composition of assessment and decision-making panels could limit the range of perspectives informing funding and programme decisions. To mitigate this risk, Research England will seek to ensure that panels include an appropriate balance of expertise, experience and perspectives, and that panel members are briefed on fair and inclusive assessment practices.

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	Unknown – expected to be minimal	No direct impacts relating to age have been identified. However, age may indirectly influence participation where factors such as career stage, professional networks or experience affect awareness of opportunities or confidence in leading applications.	Applications will be assessed on the quality of the proposed activity, expertise and ability to deliver, rather than age or seniority. Collaborative applications will be encouraged where appropriate to support participation from individuals with a range of experiences and career stages. Panel members will be briefed to make clear that they should be assessing the application in front of them. They will assess an applications' capability to deliver the proposed activities. Age is not a criterion in assessment. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Disability	Negative	Barriers may arise in application systems or panel formats. Neurodiverse and/or disabled applicants may face difficulties with the application process and accessibility, with a specific focus on concentration during application writing.	Application materials and guidance will be provided in accessible formats, and reasonable adjustments can be requested throughout the application and delivery stages. We are hosting a Q&A session for this opportunity, and we will respond by publishing a FAQ where needed.

		Inaccessible application materials, engagement activities, assessment processes or working practices could limit the participation of individuals with disabilities. This funding opportunity and any subsequent operational planning activities may therefore have indirect impacts if accessibility is not adequately considered. This consideration includes participation from internal and external assessors.	The Funding Service has been designed to comply with recognised disability access and accessibility standards, ensuring that applicants and assessors can engage fully and equitably with the application and assessment process. 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. Both applicants and assessors 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 adjustments implemented wherever feasible to remove barriers to engagement. Digital Accessibility and Inclusive Participation 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. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Gender reassignment	Unknown – expected to be minimal	There is a risk that transgender or non-binary individuals could experience inadvertent misgendering or deadnaming during the application process, engagement activities, meetings or other programme interactions if inclusive practices are not followed.	Inclusive communication practices will be promoted throughout programme delivery. Gender neutral language is important to support inclusivity, equality and representation. Language which isn't gender neutral may have an adverse impact on applicants, reviewers, and panel. Where appropriate, participants will be invited to share their preferred name and pronouns, for example through meeting profiles, online platforms or name badges. Programme staff will be encouraged to use inclusive language and respect individuals' self-identified names and gender identities. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Marriage or civil partnership	None	No impact identified.	

Pregnancy and maternity	Negative	Individuals who are pregnant, on maternity or parental leave with a new child, may be less aware of opportunities or face practical barriers to developing applications or contributing to funded projects. If meetings, events or other programme activities are not arranged flexibly, participation may be reduced.	Information about opportunities will be published openly and made available online. Where applicable and possible, meetings and engagement activities led by Research England will be scheduled at times that support participation by individuals with caring responsibilities, and recordings or written materials will be provided where appropriate. Inclusive meeting practices, including suitable breaks and consideration of facilities for breastfeeding or expressing milk, will be adopted where relevant. Flexibility in delivery arrangements will be supported where feasible and proportionate. Research England funding is provided to organisations rather than individuals. We therefore expect funded organisations to follow their established policies and procedures relating to pregnancy and maternity, including arrangements for parental leave and cover where required. This approach helps mitigate potential impacts on participation and project delivery arising from pregnancy and maternity-related absence. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Race	Unknown – expected to be minimal	This opportunity is not expected to have any direct impacts relating to race.	This funding opportunity is openly advertised, enabling a broad range of stakeholders to participate.

		However, structural underrepresentation of some minority ethnic groups within the higher education and research sector, particularly in senior leadership positions, may influence awareness of opportunities, participation in engagement activities and who leads applications.	Assessment will focus on the quality, relevance and feasibility of proposals, rather than institutional prestige or the seniority of applicants or personal characteristics. Communications and engagement activities will seek to reach a diverse range of organisations and stakeholders across the sector. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Religion or belief	Negative	This opportunity is not expected to have any direct impacts relating to religion or belief. However, participation in engagement activities, meetings or application processes could be affected if key deadlines, events or activities coincide with religious observance, festivals or prayer times.	Application period will be designed to provide sufficient time for participation. Where possible, fixed-date mandatory events will be avoided, and information will be made available through online routes. When arranging meetings and engagement activities, reasonable consideration will be given to religious observance and dietary requirements. Where in-person events are held, venues will be selected with consideration given to the availability of a suitable private space for prayer or quiet reflection where feasible. Important dates will be included in the Funding Finder so that organisations and the lead applicants can be prepared.

Sex	Unknown – expected to be minimal	This opportunity is not expected to have any direct impacts relating to sex. However, existing inequalities within the higher education and research sector may influence participation, representation and who leads applications. In addition, where personal data are collected, some individuals may feel excluded if response options do not adequately reflect their circumstances.	This funding opportunity will be open to all eligible organisations. Assessment will focus on the quality, relevance and feasibility of proposals rather than institutional prestige or the seniority of applicants or personal characteristics. Communications and engagement activities will seek to reach a diverse range of organisations and stakeholders across the sector If/where personal data are collected, response options will be reviewed to ensure they are appropriate, inclusive and compliant with relevant guidance, including the option not to disclose information where appropriate. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Sexual orientation	none	This opportunity is not expected to have any direct impacts relating to sexual orientation.	This funding will be open to all eligible organisations. Assessment will focus on the quality, relevance and feasibility of proposals. Communications and engagement activities will seek to reach a diverse range of organisations and stakeholders across the sectors. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education

			research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
--	--	--	---

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	Positive	The funding call itself is not expected to have any direct impacts relating to geographic location. However, organisations and individuals in different parts of the UK may have varying levels of capacity, existing networks and resources to engage with funding opportunities and stakeholder activities. If engagement is concentrated in particular regions or relies heavily on in-person participation, some perspectives may be underrepresented. For the awarded funding, the opportunity in particular the seed funding is expected to have a positive impact on geographical location and place by supporting collaboration between two	The funding opportunity will be promoted UK-wide and made available online. If there are Research England-led engagement events for this call and associated funding, Research England will consider , virtual or hybrid participation options to support involvement from stakeholders and reduce travel requirements. Assessment will focus on the quality and relevance of proposals rather than institutional size, location or existing networks. To mitigate exacerbating geographical inequalities, we will endeavour to take a portfolio approach to funding decisions, taking into account the overall balance and diversity of supported partnerships across different geographical contexts. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider

		self-defined geographical areas. The decision to allow places to self-define their geography is intended to ensure that funding can be used in the most meaningful and effective way, reflecting local priorities. There is a risk that funding could exacerbate existing geographical inequalities if support is concentrated in a limited number of places.	and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Socio-economic status	Unknown – expected to be minimal	The programme is not expected to have any direct impacts relating to socio-economic status. However, organisations and individuals with fewer resources, less dedicated bid-writing capacity or more limited access to established networks may face greater challenges in engaging with funding opportunities, stakeholder activities or collaborative partnerships.	Clear guidance, proportionate application requirements and transparent assessment criteria will be provided to support equitable participation. The funding opportunity will be advertised openly. Wherever possible, participation will not be dependent on attendance at any Research England led in-person events, with online, virtual or hybrid engagement options used where appropriate to reduce travel and cost barriers. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Education background		No impact identified	

Parent or guardian responsibilities	Negative	Individuals with parental or guardian responsibilities may have less flexibility to attend information sessions and engagement events scheduled at particular times. These responsibilities may also affect the time available to engage with funding opportunities or stakeholder activities.	Where possible, any potential Research England led stakeholder events and engagement activities will normally be scheduled between 10:00am and 3:00pm and planned with awareness of school holidays and caring responsibilities. Participants will be given reasonable notice of events, and virtual or hybrid participation options will be used where feasible. Recordings or written materials from information sessions will be made available where appropriate to support flexible participation. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Carer responsibilities	Negative	Individuals with caring responsibilities for children, adults or other dependants may have less flexibility to attend meetings, engagement events or information sessions scheduled at particular times. Caring responsibilities may also affect the time available to engage with funding opportunities or stakeholder activities.	Where possible, any potential Research England led stakeholder events and engagement activities will normally be scheduled between 10:00am and 3:00pm and planned with awareness of caring responsibilities. Participants will be given reasonable notice of events, and timings will vary where appropriate to support participation from individuals with different caring arrangements. Information about the funding opportunity will be published online, and recordings or written materials from information sessions will be made available where appropriate to support

			flexible engagement. Virtual or hybrid participation options will be used where feasible to reduce barriers associated with travel and caring responsibilities. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)		No direct impacts relating to political opinion have been identified. This funding opportunity is designed to support collaborative activity across two distinct, self-defined geographical areas. Participation for the seed funding is open to organisations from across the UK including Northern Ireland, provided applicants meet the published eligibility requirements. Access to the opportunity, assessment outcomes and funding decisions will be based solely on the published aims, objectives and assessment criteria set out in the funding opportunity, rather than any political affiliation, opinion or viewpoint. Overall, the opportunity is considered unlikely to have a differential impact in relation to political opinion.	Any engagement activities around the call will be conducted in an inclusive and impartial manner, regardless of participants' political opinions. Programme communications, engagement activities and decision-making processes will focus on the objectives of the programme and be delivered in accordance with Codes of Conduct. Successful applicants in receipt of funding are expected to consider and understand the impact of new approaches on the culture and environment of our higher education research and innovation system for example the impact on equity, inclusion, diversity, trust and collective responsibility.



Other characteristics		No impact identified	

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**
While no significant direct negative impacts have been identified, proportionate adaptations will be made to the design and delivery of the programme to support inclusive access, participation and engagement.
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?

EDI considerations will be kept under review throughout the delivery of this funding opportunity and the development of the subsequent evidence-based implementation plan. This will include ongoing consideration of inclusive practices within programme and contract management activities.

This EIA will be treated as a live document and reviewed periodically as the programme progresses. Emerging evidence, stakeholder feedback and delivery experience will be used to identify any unintended impacts and inform appropriate mitigations.

What is the EIA review date?

01 April 2027

Contact

The Collaboration for a Sustainable Future programme team:

strategicprogrammes@re.ukri.org

Will the EIA be published?

Yes.

Who has this been signed off by?

Bethany Adams, Associate Director, Research England (strategicprogrammes@re.ukri.org)

Submitting the form

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

Change log

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?



Provide panel members with standard UKRI/RE review and panel meeting briefing, including reminders of UKRI assessment principles and expectations for bias-aware decision-making	Prior to panel meeting	RE CSF Delivery Team	Confirmation from panel chair and observers	Reinforces fairness and consistency in assessment.
Follow UKRI and RE best practice to aim for a balanced panel membership	At panel building stage	RE CSF Delivery Team	Regular review of panel member invites and acceptances	The assessment panel is diverse
Design accessible and proportionate survey and funding processes	Programme launch	RE CSF Delivery Team	Through CSF programme governance.	Inclusive access to opportunity
Promote opportunities through open channels	Programme launch	RE CSF Delivery Team	Through CSF programme governance.	Wider awareness
Provide reasonable adjustments and accessible participation options	Programme launch	RE CSF Delivery Team	Through CSF programme governance.	Reduced barriers
Review and update the EIA	TBC	RE CSF Delivery Team	Through CSF programme governance.	Identification and mitigation of emerging risks