



UK Research and Innovation Equality Impact Assessment Form

About your activity

Title of your activity

Small-satellite Missions Sandpit

Council or business area

UKRI Space Programme

Aims and objectives

This investment is part of the UKRI Space Programme, part of the portfolio of UKRI Priority Programmes that are aligned with the eight Industrial Strategy Sectors and additional government priorities (known as IS8+). The programme aims to demonstrably strengthen the Research and Innovation foundations of the UK space sector by enabling new funding opportunities and supporting capability growth. The Programme's priorities have been selected in alignment with the UK Space Strategy and UKRI strengths and ambition.

During this Spending Review period until 2030, the programme with focus on two priority areas:

- Earth Observation and Data
- Launch Platforms and Small Satellites

The initial investment will be in the form of pump-priming research grants for 11 months in 2027/2028, delivered through a sandpit funding opportunity. It aims to develop small satellite mission concepts involving innovative sensors, data streams and other cross-sector enabling technologies. These mission concepts should strengthen sovereign capability, address societal and national security challenges, and support economic growth.

This Equality Impact Assessment covers all aspects of the sandpit, including advertising, the application process, participant selection, delivery of the sandpit, assessment of full applications and funded projects. It will be updated for future UKRI Space Programme opportunities as they arise.



Sandpit details

This sandpit will bring together researchers and innovators from different disciplines to form new collaborations and co-develop ambitious, challenge-led, small-satellite missions concepts. A Director will lead the sandpit, supported by a team of mentors. Together, they will help participants explore challenges, develop ideas and shape emerging projects. The Director and mentors will also act as independent reviewers and recommend projects for funding.

Applicants will apply through an Expression of Interest (EOI) stage. We expect to select around 30 participants based primarily on their responses to the assessment questions. We will also consider career stages and region to create a diverse group of participants.

The sandpit will be delivered over six sessions between 26 January and 11 February 2027, through a combination of a two-day residential and online sessions.

Professional facilitators will co-design and support the delivery of the event. Government representatives, industry stakeholders and end users will be invited to take part.

Following the sandpit, project leads and project co-leads recommended for funding will be invited to submit a full application. The Director and mentors will assess these applications to confirm that they remain aligned with the vision, scope and objectives developed during the sandpit.

Who is affected?

- Researchers and innovators applying to participate in the sandpit and those involved in invited submissions and awards.
- Government representatives, industry stakeholders and end users who may become project partners on applications.
- Sandpit Director and mentors, involved as sandpit participant selectors and application assessors.
- Professional facilitators contracted to co-design and co-deliver the sandpit.
- UKRI Staff involved in delivering and administering the opportunity and managing the investment, including as sandpit participant selectors.
- Research office staff at HEIs supporting researchers to submit and manage their applications and awards.

What data and consultation have you used?

- We consulted colleagues across UKRI on the delivery approach for this funding opportunity, including the scope and format of the sandpit. The UKRI Space Programme Board approved the proposed approach.
- We discussed the aims of the funding opportunity and the purpose of the sandpit with the UKRI Space Strategic Advisory Group (SSAG).



- We followed UKRI and NERC guidance on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Equality Impact Assessments (EIA). We also consulted with the NERC Diversity team.
- We worked with colleagues in EPSRC and others who have delivered successful sandpits to identify good practice and lessons learned. We also reviewed previous EIAs from previous sandpits.
- The sandpit Director, mentors and facilitators will provide further input as we develop the activity.

Impact on specific groups

Are there general impacts on multiple groups?

A number of cross-cutting impacts have been identified and considered as part of the design and delivery of this activity.

Participation and accessibility

The sandpit includes mandatory in-person and online sessions. These elements will not run concurrently, and participants will not have a choice between attendance modes for individual sessions. The requirement to attend all sessions may create barriers for some individuals, particularly where travel, caring responsibilities, health conditions, accessibility requirements or work patterns affect participation.

We have designed the sandpit to reduce barriers to participation wherever possible while retaining the benefits of collaborative, face-to-face working. We will:

- combines in-person and online delivery to reduce the overall time commitment away from home and normal working environments, while still retaining the benefits of face-to-face collaboration that is essential to the effectiveness of the sandpit
- reimburse travel and subsistence costs and provide accommodation where attendance requires an overnight stay
- publish key dates and attendance requirements well in advance to support planning
- select a venue with accessibility and transport links as key considerations
- ensure funding opportunity and online events follow UKRI accessibility guidelines
- enable participants to request reasonable adjustments at any point during the activity

Selection and assessment

The sandpit participant selection process relies on judgement by the Director, mentors and UKRI staff. There is a risk that conscious or unconscious bias could influence decision-making and disadvantage applicants from particular backgrounds, institutions, career stages, regions or groups.



To support fair and inclusive selection and assessment, we will:

- promote the opportunity widely through UKRI channels and relevant stakeholder networks
- select sandpit participants against published assessment criteria
- provide guidance on unconscious bias and inclusive decision-making to selectors and assessors
- consider career stage and region as diversity factors alongside the primary assessment criteria when selecting participants
- handle participant information confidentially and only share with those who need to know for the delivery of the activity

Inclusivity

The sandpit can be an intensive activity, involving team formation, group discussion and proposal development. There is a risk that some participants may have fewer opportunities to contribute because of research culture, perceived hierarchies, communication styles, unconscious bias or exclusionary behaviours. There is also a risk of discrimination, bullying, harassment, microaggressions or exclusionary practices occurring during the activity.

We want all participants to feel able to contribute fully to the sandpit. To foster an inclusive and respectful environment, we will:

- Set clear expectations for professional and respectful behaviour through a code of conduct
- Provide guidance on unconscious bias and inclusive behaviours before the event
- Ensure mentors and facilitators support inclusive participation and challenge inappropriate behaviour where necessary
- Provide opportunities for participants to raise concerns and provide feedback throughout the activity

Event design and delivery

The success of the sandpit relies on bringing together people from different disciplines, sectors, and backgrounds to develop new ideas and collaborations. There is a risk that the format, materials or delivery approach could unintentionally create barriers to participation.

Equality, diversity and inclusion considerations will be embedded through the design and delivery of the activity. To minimise barriers to participation, we will:

- use clear, concise and accessible language throughout the funding opportunity and event materials
- avoid unnecessary jargon and acronyms wherever possible
- use inclusive and gender-neutral language
- consider accessibility, wellbeing, religious observance and dietary requirements in our event planning
- include regular breaks and sufficient rest periods within the sandpit agenda

Awarded projects

The funded projects are expected to have a fixed start date and duration. The project duration will not automatically be extended pro rata for part-time working patterns.

UKRI's grant management arrangements provide flexibility to support a range of individual circumstances. To minimise potential impacts, we will:

- apply UKRI's standard grant terms and conditions, including provisions relating to sickness absence, parental leave and flexible working
- consider grant change requests through normal grant management processes where project delivery can be maintained
- expect research organisations to fulfil their responsibilities under equality legislation, including providing reasonable adjustments where required

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	Negative	The Director, mentors and UKRI staff may have unconscious bias when selecting participants to the sandpit based on age. Researchers at an earlier career stage may be disadvantaged if assessors place undue weight on established track record rather than the skills and expertise sought through the assessment criteria. (It is assumed that early career researchers are generally younger than their more	The opportunity will be open to applicants from all career stages, subject to UKRI's individual eligibility policy and standard organisation eligibility for UKRI funding. Applicants and participants will not be required to disclose their age. We will seek an appropriate mix of career stages when selecting participants. Career stage will be considered as part of creating a balanced and diverse participant group, alongside the primary

		experienced peers, although this is by no means always the case. This is why this point has been included under 'age'). During the sandpit, participants perceived to have less experience may have fewer opportunities to influence discussions or shape project development. Research culture and hierarchy may also lead to project teams being dominated by more senior participants.	assessment criteria. Participants will self-identify their career stage. Track record will not form an explicit assessment criterion. Guidance for selectors and assessors will make clear that applications should be assessed against the published criteria and the applicant's ability to contribute to the sandpit. Guidance for selectors, assessors and participants will include information on unconscious bias and inclusive behaviours.
Disability	Negative	The design and delivery of the activity could unintentionally create barriers for disabled people. People with physical disabilities may face barriers to attending in-person days if venues, accommodation, transport links or event activities are not fully accessible. People with neurodivergent conditions may find long sessions, intensive group working or changes to the programme more challenging to navigate. People with sensory impairments may experience barriers when accessing written materials, presentations and discussions. Participants may require reasonable adjustments to participate fully.	Applicants and participants are not required to disclose a disability. They may request reasonable adjustments at any stage of the activity. Any information disclosed will be handled confidentially. All funding opportunity guidance will follow the UKRI accessibility guidance. Alternative formats will be available on request. The sandpit has been designed to combine in-person and online delivery to reduce the amount of time participants are required to spend away from their normal working environments and home. However, the online sessions are part of a structured programme and are not alternatives to the in-person sessions. We will select an accessible and consider identified requirements such as step-free access, audio-

		Participants with long-term health conditions may require greater flexibility in how they engage with activities.	visual support and accessible facilities. Online sessions will use accessible features including chat functions and closed captioning. The agenda will include regular breaks and sufficient rest periods. Information about disability and accessibility support for UKRI applicants and grant holders will be included in the funding opportunity.
Gender reassignment	Negative	Participants may experience accidental misgendering through event communications, introductions or interactions with other attendees. A person's pronouns may be used incorrectly during the sandpit or related communications. Applicants or participants may experience discrimination, exclusion bullying or harassment because of their race or ethnic background. A lack of inclusive facilities or inclusive event environment could discourage participation or affect an individual's ability to participate fully. Participants and applicants may need to take time away from the activity, application submission or award because	Applicants and participants will not be required to disclose whether they identify as a different gender from their sex assigned at birth. Any personal information shared will be handled confidentially. We will use inclusive and gender-neutral language throughout the funding opportunity and event and encourage participants to share their preferred pronouns if they wish to do so. Participants will receive guidance on unconscious bias. A clear code of conduct will set expectations for respectful and inclusive behaviour throughout the activity. Facilitators will support inclusive participation and address inappropriate behaviour where necessary. We will seek venues that provide inclusive facilities, including

		of gender reassignment-related healthcare appointments or other aspects of transition.	gender-neutral toilets where available. UKRI grant terms and conditions provide flexibility for medical absences. We would expect that absence related to transition would be covered by the Research Organisation's relevant policies and strongly encourage research organisations to treat absence relating to transition like any other health-related absence.
Marriage or civil partnership	None	No specific impacts identified.	
Pregnancy and maternity	Negative	The intensive and time-limited nature of the sandpit may create barriers for participants who are pregnant, on parental leave or balancing caring responsibilities. Attendance at in-person sessions may be more difficult for people with childcare or other caring responsibilities. Pregnancy-related health needs may require greater flexibility in how participants engage with the application process, sandpit activities or follow-up submissions. The short duration of funded projects may create challenges for project leads or project co-leads who need to take parental leave during the award period.	Applicants and participants are not required to disclose pregnancy, or maternity or parental leave status. They may request reasonable adjustments at any stage of the activity. Any information shared will be handled confidentially. Key dates will be publicised in advance to support planning. We will work with participants to identify reasonable adjustments. UKRI provides support for people with caring responsibilities. Participants may claim additional childcare costs associated with attending the event if outside of their normal childcare provisions. Suitable facilities, including a private space for nursing or wellbeing, will be available where required. The agenda will include regular breaks and sufficient rest periods.

			UKRI terms and conditions include provisions relating to parental leave for successful awards.
Race	Negative	The Director, mentors and UKRI staff may have unconscious bias when selecting participants on the basis of race or ethnicity. Applicants or participants may experience discrimination, exclusion bullying or harassment because of their race or ethnic background. Participants from minority ethnic groups may be underrepresented within the participant group or project teams. Participants whose first language is not English may face barriers when completing the application process, participating in discussions or contributing to project development during the sandpit.	Applicants and participants will not be required to disclose their race or ethnic background. Guidance for selectors and assessors will include information on unconscious bias and inclusive decision-making. Participants will receive guidance on unconscious bias. A clear code of conduct will set expectations for respectful and inclusive behaviour throughout the activity. Facilitators will support inclusive participation and address inappropriate behaviour where necessary. All funding opportunity materials will use clear, concise and accessible language. We will minimise unnecessary jargon and acronyms.
Religion or belief	Negative	Applicants and participants may be unable to take part in some activities if they coincide with religious observances or festivals. Applicants and participants may experience discrimination, exclusion or unconscious bias because of their religion, belief or lack of belief.	Applicants and participants will not be required to disclose their religion or beliefs. They may request reasonable adjustments at any stage of the activity. We will provide a clear timeline of key milestones and event dates to enable participants to plan ahead. We will consider major religious festivals and observances when

		Participants may have dietary, scheduling or observance requirements that affect their ability to participate fully in the sandpit.	scheduling key activities and make using an appropriate and make reasonable efforts to avoid conflicts. We will consider dietary requirements, including halal, kosher, vegetarian and vegan diets. We will provide access to prayer or quiet spaces during in-person activities where possible and accommodate reasonable requests related to religious observance.
Sex	Negative	The Director, mentors and UKRI staff may have unconscious bias when selecting participants or mentors on the basis of sex. Applicants and participants may experience discrimination, exclusion, bullying or harassment because of their sex. One sex may be underrepresented among participants, mentors or project teams, limiting diversity of perspectives and participation. Gender stereotypes, power dynamics or established research hierarchies may affect participation in discussions, team formation and project development during the sandpit. The language used in the funding opportunity, application process or sandpit	Applicants and participants will not be required to disclose their sex. Guidance for selectors and assessors will include information on unconscious bias and inclusive decision-making. A clear code of conduct will set expectations for respectful and inclusive behaviour. Facilitators, mentors and UKRI staff will support an inclusive environment and address inappropriate behaviour where necessary. We will use inclusive and gender-neutral language throughout the funding opportunity, application materials and sandpit activities.

		materials could unintentionally discourage participation from some groups.	
Sexual orientation	Negative	Applicants and participants may experience discrimination, exclusion, bullying or harassment because of their sexual orientation. A lack of an inclusive environment could discourage participation or full engagement with the sandpit.	Participants will not be required to disclose their sexual orientation. We will use inclusive language throughout the funding opportunity and event. A clear code of conduct will set expectations for respectful and inclusive behaviour. Facilitators, mentors and UKRI staff will support an inclusive environment and address inappropriate behaviour where necessary.

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	Negative	Participation may be affected by the location of the in-person elements of the sandpit. Applicants and participants who are based further from the venue may face longer travel times and higher costs associated with attendance.	When selecting the venue, we will consider accessibility from across all four UK nations. Transport links will be a key consideration, with a preference for locations that can be reached by a range of transport options.

		Attendance at all scheduled sessions, whether online or in person, will be mandatory. The requirement to attend in-person sessions may create barriers for some individuals. If awareness of the opportunity varies across different parts of the UK, some regions may be underrepresented among applicants and participants.	Travel and subsistence costs will be reimbursed. Accommodation will be provided for participants where attendance requires overnight stays. Key dates will be published well in advance to allow participants to plan accordingly. The opportunity will be promoted widely through the UKRI Funding Finder and stakeholder networks to encourage participation from all regions of the UK. Place will be considered as part of creating a balanced and diverse group of sandpit participants from across all regions of the UK, alongside the primary assessment criteria.
Socio-economic status	Negative	Socio-economic status may intersect with other characteristics, such as geographic locations, disability and caring responsibilities. Attendance at all scheduled sessions, whether online or in person, will be mandatory. The requirement to attend in-person sessions involving travel and overnight stays may create barriers for some individuals. Access to professional networks and development opportunities may vary depending on an individual's background and institution.	Travel and subsistence costs will be reimbursed. Accommodation will be provided where attendance requires overnight stays. Key dates and attendance requirements will be published well in advance to support planning. The opportunity will be promoted widely through the UKRI Funding Finder and stakeholder networks to encourage participation from a broad range of organisations and backgrounds. Selection of participants will be based on the published assessment criteria and not on institution, professional network or previous opportunities.



Education background	Negative	The Director, mentors and UKRI Staff may have unconscious bias towards applicants from particular research organisations, institutions or educational backgrounds. Applicants from less research-intensive organisations, smaller institutions or non-traditional backgrounds may be disadvantaged if assessors place undue weight on institutional reputation. Use of unnecessary jargon and academic language could impact inclusion.	The selection of sandpit participants will be based on the published assessment criteria and responses to the core assessment questions, which focus on skills and potential contribution to the sandpit rather than track record. Guidance for selectors and assessors will include information on unconscious bias and inclusive decision-making. The Résumé for Research and Innovation (R4RI) format will be used for invited applications to support broader recognition of skills, contributions and experience. Funding opportunity materials and guidance will use clear and accessible language and avoid unnecessary jargon wherever possible.
Parent or guardian responsibilities	Negative	Parental or guardian responsibilities may limit an individual's ability to attend or participate fully in the sandpit, particularly where attendance at mandatory in-person sessions requires travel and overnight stays.	UKRI provides support for people with childcare responsibilities. Participants may claim additional childcare costs associated with attending the event if outside of their normal childcare provisions. The sandpit and other key dates have been selected to avoid UK school holidays where possible. These have been published well in advance to allow individuals to plan accordingly.
Carer responsibilities	Negative	Caring responsibilities may limit an individual's ability to attend or participate fully in the sandpit, particularly where attendance at mandatory in-	UKRI provides support for people with caring responsibilities. Participants may claim additional caring costs associated with attending the event if outside of their normal care provisions.



		person sessions requires travel and overnight stays.	Key dates have been published well in advance to allow individuals to plan accordingly.
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)		Event unlikely to be held in Northern Ireland.	
Other characteristics		None identified.	

Final decision

Make a decision on whether to proceed with the activity

While negative impacts have been identified, mitigating actions will be implemented throughout the process as indicated above. We will adapt or change the activity in a way which will eliminate negative impact or promote equality.

Review and sign off

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

Contact details will be provided on the funding opportunity to support queries related to sandpit participation and measures we are taking to mitigate any negative impacts of the activity.

The EIA will be reviewed regularly throughout the life cycle of the activity (before participant selection, before the sandpit, and evaluation after the sandpit and funding decision have been made).

We will seek feedback from sandpit participants on their experience.

What is the EIA review date?

04/01/2027, ahead of the sandpit event.



Contact

UKRI Space Programme team; contact smallsatsandpit@ukri.org for this activity.

Will the EIA be published?

Yes, under 'additional information' on the published funding opportunity page.

Who has this been signed off by?

Kevin Smith, Interim Programme Director, UKRI Space Programme, 21/09/2026.

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
Jennifer Morris, Senior Portfolio Manager, NERC	16/09/2026	1	Completion of the Equality Impact Assessment for this activity
		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?