Equality Impact Assessment Guidance and Template

This document provides guidance when completing an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA template can be found at the end of this document.

The Research Councils are committed to promoting equality and participation in all their activities, whether this is related to the work we do with our external stakeholders or whether this is related to our responsibilities as an employer. As public authorities we are also required to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations when making decisions and developing policies. To do this, it is necessary to understand the potential impacts of the range of internal and external activities on different groups of people.

What is an Equality Impact assessment (EIA) and why do we need to complete one?
An equality impact assessment (EIA) is an evidence-based approach designed to help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, events and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups from participation. This covers both strategic and operational activities.

The term 'policy', as used throughout this document, covers the range of functions, activities and decisions for which your organisation is responsible, including for example, strategic decision-making, arranging strategy & funding panels, conferences, training courses and employment policies.

The EIA will help to ensure that:

- we understand the potential effects of the policy by assessing the impacts on different groups both external and internal
- any adverse impacts are identified and actions identified to remove or mitigate them
- decisions are transparent and based on evidence with clear reasoning.

When might I need to complete an EIA?
Whether an EIA is needed or not will depend on the likely impact that the policy may have and relevance of the activity to equality. The EIA should be done when the need for a new policy or practice is identified, or when an existing one is reviewed. Depending on the type of policy or activity advice can be sought from either your HR team, your Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team, your Peer Review Policy team or their equivalents.

Ideally, an EIA should form part of any new policy, event or funding activity and be factored in as early as one would for other considerations such as risk, budget or health and safety.

Who is responsible for completing and signing off the EIA?
Depending on the nature of the policy, event or funding activity, the responsibility of who should complete the assessment, who should be consulted, and who should sign off the EIA will vary. Ultimate responsibility on whether an EIA is required and the evaluation decision(s) made after completing the EIA lies with the Senior Responsible Officer, budget

holder, project board or the most relevant senior manager. Further advice is available from your Equality, Diversity & Inclusion contact.

What is discrimination?
Discrimination is where someone is treated less favourably or put at a disadvantage because of their protected characteristic. The different groups covered by the Equality Act are referred to as protected characteristics: disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, sex (gender), and age.

Discrimination is usually unintended and can often remain undetected until there is a complaint. Improving or promoting equality is when you identify ways to remove barriers and improve participation for people or groups with a protected characteristic.

Building the evidence, making a judgement
In cases of new policies or management decisions there may be little evidence of the potential effect on protected characteristic groups. In such cases you should make a judgement that is as reliable as possible. Consultation will strengthen these value judgements by building a consensus that can avoid obvious prejudices or assumptions.

Consultation
Consultation can add evidence to the assessment. Consultation is very important and key to demonstrating that organisations are meeting the equality duties, but it also needs to be proportionate and relevant. Considering the degree and range of consultation will safe-guard against 'groupthink' by involving a diverse range of consultees. These are the key considerations, to avoid over-consultation on a small policy or practice and under-consultation on a significant policy or an activity that has the potential to create barriers to participation.

Provisional Assessment
At the initial stages, you may not have all the evidence you need so you can conduct a provisional assessment. Where a provisional assessment has been carried out, there must be plans to gather the required data so that a full assessment can be completed after a reasonable time. The scale of these plans should be proportionate to the activity at hand. When there is enough evidence a full impact assessment should be prepared. Only one EIA should be created for each policy, as more evidence becomes available the provisional assessment should be built upon.

Valuing Differences
EIAs are about making comparisons between groups of employees, service users or stakeholders to identify differences in their needs and/or requirements. If the difference is disproportionate, then the policy may have a detrimental impact on some and not others.

'You are looking for bias that can occur when there are significant differences (disproportionate difference) between groups of people in the way a policy or practice has impacted on them, asking the question "Why?" and investigating further'. [1]

Evaluation Decision

There are four options open to you:

1. No barriers or impact identified, therefore activity will **proceed**.
2. You can decide to **stop** the policy or practice at some point because the evidence shows bias towards one or more groups
3. You can **adapt or change** the policy in a way which you think will eliminate the bias, or
4. Barriers and impact identified, however having considered all available options carefully, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the aim of the policy or practice (e.g. in **extreme cases** or where **positive action** is taken). Therefore you are going to **proceed with caution** with this policy or practice knowing that it may favour some people less than others, providing justification for this decision.

In most cases, where disproportionate disadvantage is found by carrying out EIAs, policies **and practices are usually changed or adapted. In these cases, or when a change has been** justified you should consider making a record on the project risk register.

Examples of recently completed EIA templates can be found in annex 1.

Please send completed EIAs to EDI@esrc.ukri.org

[1] http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/s/n/Acas_managers_guide_to_equality_assessments.pdf

Equality Impact Assessment

	Question	Response
1.	**Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed**	ESRC Research Grants Round 2 – September 2023 to August 2024
2.	**Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event**	The ESRC Research Grants funding opportunity invites proposals from eligible individuals and research teams for standard research projects, large-scale surveys and other infrastructure projects and for methodological developments. The opportunity offers researchers considerable flexibility to focus on any subject area or topic providing that it falls within ESRC's remit. Proposals can draw from the wider sciences, but the social sciences must represent more than 50 per cent of the research focus and effort. We particularly encourage ambitious and novel research proposals addressing new concepts and techniques and those with the potential for significant scientific or societal and economic impact. We are also keen to encourage fresh ideas from new researchers and appropriate proposals are welcomed from those with limited research experience. Our funding decisions are based on a number of criteria including scientific quality, timeliness, potential impact and value for money. The opportunity is for applications ranging from £350,000 to £1 million (100 per cent full economic cost (fEC)) for a period of up to five years. Whilst there are specific rounds, the opportunity is always open.
3.	**What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy?** *(e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)*	Consultation with the ESRC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group
4.	**Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?**	Applicants to the ESRC Research Grants funding opportunity (Social Science Researchers across the academic life-course are eligible to apply). Grant Assessment Panel Members and ESRC staff attending the GAP and GDG meetings.
5.	**What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?**	The opportunity is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis by the Grants Delivery Group which meets three times a year following Grants Assessment Panel meetings to make funding decisions, scrutinise panel outcomes and discuss policy issues relating to the opportunities it is responsible for.

GENERAL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

The ESRC Research Grants funding opportunity is designed with fairness in mind.

Eligibility and criteria

- The Research Grants funding opportunity is open to all eligible research organisations (RO). Applicants are eligible for funding regardless of whether they are established members of a recognised RO, but applicants who are not an established member of a recognised RO must be accommodated by the RO and provided with appropriate facilities 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 now 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.

Standard Grant 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.

Panel recruitment:

- Panel members are appointed, first and foremost, based on 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. Final decisions take into account trying to balance the panels by gender and geography (to ensure UK-wide representation) and seek 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.
- We aim to ensure that the composition of the panels is diverse, with each panel having at least a 60:40 gender balance, and if this is not possible we seek to ensure that there is a 60:40 gender balance across the GAPs as a whole.
- Where possible we ensure that the chair and vice chair of each panel are not the same gender.
- We encourage applicants across the full range of protected characteristics, and following each recruitment round we look at panel composition by race/ethnicity and disability status and consider if we need to take additional action at the subsequent recruitment round (for instance, targeted advertising). We do not impose quotas.

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.
- As a Government Digital Service (GDS) TFS is built to an AA accessibility standard and the team cannot release code unless it passes tests to ensure compliance with that standard. TFS's interaction designers are trained in accessible design and to ensure it is accessible they undertake regular audits with the Disability Accessibility Centre (DAC) who run the service through human-based testing with people who have a wide range of disabilities. The accessibility statement for the TFS can be found at Accessibility statement for the UKRI Funding Service – UKRI
- Whilst the ESRC Research Grants funding opportunity has specific rounds, the closing dates of these are timetabled to avoid common holiday periods because of the potential impact on those with child-care responsibilities. The next opportunity round is scheduled to open immediately after the previous one closes, to ensure that the opportunity is always open to receive applications.
- As part of implementation, and where future system functionality and policy changes are made between rounds, we undertake to give approximately eight weeks' notice using pre-call announcements.
- Bespoke guidance in The Funding Service has been reviewed to ensure wording is accessible as possible.

Peer Review Process

- The ESRC Peer Review College should be the first source of peer reviewers consulted by ESRC staff. All members of the ESRC community are encouraged to complete the ESRC peer review training tool which is mandatory for Peer Review College members. The training tool outlines the ESRC's standard peer review process and emphasises the importance of timely, objective, fair and informed peer review.
- The membership of the Peer Review College aims to reflect the community it represents, and efforts are made to achieve an appropriately balanced membership in terms of gender, age, ethnic origin etc.
- Where it is not possible to secure the necessary peer review from within the college membership ESRC case officers will look beyond the college membership.
- Peer reviewers are required to evidence their views and scores. ESRC staff conduct usability checks on all peer review comments and where there is evidence of bias or a reviewer has failed to provide evidence for their scores the review will be marked as 'unusable'.

Panel Review Process

- All panel members participate in an induction and training session which covers issues including fairness, objectivity and unconscious bias.
- It is the role of panel members to moderate and assess the quality of peer review and to agree final scores for each proposal.
- The ESRC provides briefings to panel members on unconscious bias and encourages members to constructively challenge potential bias where they identify it. The Panel Chairs and Panel Secretaries play a particularly important role in this respect. An implementation intention statement is read out at the beginning of each meeting which sets the tone for discussions and requires that panel members pay close attention to the scoring criteria and definitions. ESRC staff are also able to challenge bias if identified at other stages of the assessment process.

- For each proposal we appoint two academic panel introducers who formally assess and score the proposal, and three readers (two academics and one user member) who are asked to participate.

Protected Characteristic Group	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
Disability	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. The Funding Service is compliant with relevant accessibility standards.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Solicit information from panel meeting participants (in confidence) about any additional requirements they may have in order to fully participate. Most meetings will be held virtually. Where an in-person meeting is scheduled, this will have the facility for members to join remotely where this is necessary. Online meeting platforms offer an accessible and inclusive environment for participants. Depending on the needs identified, considerations might include: • The chat function and closed captioning can be enabled, and volume adjusted, to support those with hearing requirements; • Where there are particular constraints consider opportunities for participants to engage in a different way (e.g., tele-conference);

Protected Characteristic Group	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
			• Consider the length of any online meetings, shorten if necessary, and ensure that plenty of breaks are built into the agenda; Where used, we will try to ensure that venues offer an accessible and inclusive environment for participants. We will also ensure that plenty of breaks are built into the agenda.
Gender reassignment	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. UKRI records may show the wrong gender.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Consideration needs to be given at UKRI level as to how records (including Gateway to Research and other communications materials) might be adjusted. At virtual panel meetings, members may wish to include pronouns in biography.
Marriage or civil partnership	Probably not		
Pregnancy and maternity	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Provision for parental leave (including maternity leave, paternity leave and

Protected Characteristic Group	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
			leave related to surrogacy and adoption) are covered in the UKRI terms and conditions. We should ensure the use of gender neutral language – parental leave, irrespective of sexual orientation. 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.
Race	Potential negative	See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations (particularly in relation to panel composition and mitigations against unconscious bias)
Religion or belief	Potential negative	See above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. There could be potential discrimination because it is known	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations (particularly in relation to panel composition and mitigations against

Protected Characteristic Group	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
		that somebody (either a panel member, a research applicant or research participants) has a particular faith or belief.	unconscious bias) Ensure that religious observances are taken into account when planning panel meetings. Considerations might include: • Scheduling meetings to avoid major religious festivals; (if impossible to avoid, otherwise consider mitigations) • Allowing prayer breaks if requested • If in person any dietary requirements or seating arrangements
Sexual orientation	Probably not		
Sex (gender)	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Use of language can present a barrier to participation and it may be perceived that those with caring responsibilities are disadvantaged. Panel members may be disadvantaged and unable to attend meetings if they have caring responsibilities	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations. Ensure use of gender neutral language in call specification, guidance, etc. Ensure that the panel has balanced gender representation (aim for no higher than 60:40 split) Ensure that the meeting location is suitable to allow easy return home Reimbursement of additional childcare costs if the meeting

Protected Characteristic Group	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
			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)
Age	Potential negative	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.	Also see above, under General Equality and Diversity Considerations.
Other characteristics not protected under the Equality Act	Potential negative. We wish to ensure that potential applicants and stakeholders are not disadvantaged by geography, institutional status etc.		We work to ensure that panels are balanced as far as possible (within the constraints of quality and appropriateness) across the range of protected characteristics, and across broader characteristics including participation from post-1992 and Russell Group institutions, ensuring that we have a good geographical spread of panel members across the four nations of the UK, and across a diversity of career stages and paths.

Note: Excessive use of repeated line breaks can make a document inaccessible for users of assistive technologies. To ensure inclusion, please ensure a new table row is inserted for each point if there is more than one consideration or impact for each group (please ensure you populate the "protected characteristic

group" column e.g. "disability continued"); rather than using the same row for multiple points with repeated line breaks to separate points.

Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the proposed policy or activity or change in policy or activity could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	See the potential negative impacts outlined above.	
Final Decision:	**Tick the relevant box**	**Include any explanation / justification required**
1. No barriers identified, therefore activity will **proceed**.		
2. You can decide to **stop** the policy or practice at some point because the data shows bias towards one or more groups		
3. You can **adapt or change** the policy in a way which you think will eliminate the bias	**X**	See the mitigations outlined above.
4. Barriers and impact identified, however having considered all available options carefully, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the aim of the policy or practice (e.g. in extreme cases or where positive action is taken). Therefore you are going to **proceed with caution** with this policy or practice knowing that it may favour some people less than others, providing justification for this decision.		

Will this EIA be published* *EIAs should be published alongside relevant funding activities e.g. calls and events.	**Yes – with the Opportunity on the Funding Finder**
Date completed:	**11 September 2023**
End date of activity: (if applicable)	**N/A**
Review date (if applicable):	**26th January 2024**