

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.

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

Equality Impact Assessment

Question	Response
<p>1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed</p>	<p>Funding Opportunity for the doctoral landscape award 2024 (BBRC-NERC).</p> <p>The focus of this EIA is the funding opportunity process, the effects on potential applicants, applicants and the assessment panel.</p> <p>Students are covered under the UKRI terms and conditions which have had a separate EIA - https://www.ukri.org/publications/equality-impact-assessment-of-ukris-standard-training-grant-terms-and-conditions/ and actions addressed as part of the new deal for postgraduate research.</p>
<p>2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event</p>	<p>The funding opportunity is for the doctoral landscape award 2024 which will award funding for doctoral training for five annual cohort intakes from October 2025. Eligible organisations can apply for funding for studentships across the full disciplinary range of the biosciences and the environmental sciences.</p> <p>This funding opportunity will be delivered as a competitive open call.</p> <p>Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision • Approach • Student experience and EDI • Capability to deliver • Partnerships and governance
<p>3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)</p>	<p>Changes are being introduced following the move towards collective talent funding across UKRI.</p> <p>Internal consultation has taken place with the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talent Strategy Leadership team • BBSRC People and Talent Strategy Advisory Panel (PAT SAP), BBSRC Council and senior leadership team • NERC Council and senior leadership team • Utilising existing UKRI workstreams and Research Council reviews (e.g., NERC cohort training review) <p>This work has been developed parallel with the move towards collective talent funding. The assessment criteria and process have been co-developed with colleagues from AHRC, BBSRC and NERC.</p>

<p>4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?</p>	<p>Potential applicants (individuals and institutions) to the Funding Opportunity who may make a decision on whether to apply based on the timing and wording of the funding opportunity.</p> <p>Applicants who apply to the Funding Opportunity.</p> <p>Assessment panel members.</p> <p>Partners and stakeholders within the Doctoral Landscape Award e.g., policy-makers, end-users.</p>
<p>5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?</p>	<p>All correspondence about the funding opportunity with the research community will be monitored by the programme managers and senior programme managers for any evidence of potential negative impacts/signs of bias being raised and, following discussions with the Associate Director and Senior Leadership team, they will be addressed accordingly.</p> <p>Those involved in the assessment of proposals will be as diverse as possible. Panel guidance will be written to ensure bias is removed at the assessment stage. UKRI panel best practice guidelines will be followed at all times and the panel will be encouraged to identify potential bias with UKRI staff so it can be addressed appropriately.</p>

General equality, diversity and inclusion considerations

Eligibility, criteria and funding opportunity

- The funding opportunity is open to all UK-based Research Organisations that are eligible to receive research council funding.
- Panels are instructed to conduct their assessment based only on the information provided within the application. They should not use any other information to inform the assessment including the reputation of the applicant and/or research organisation as this would be a form of confirmation bias.
- Ensure the assessment criteria are objective, transparent and robust.
- Inclusion of specific diversity, equity and inclusion wording on the funding opportunity.

Standard Training Grant terms and conditions

- UKRI Training 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, provision of part-time and flexible working, and studentship extensions).
- Research Organisations are subject to equality legislation and have a duty to comply with it. TGC3.4 states that the Research Organisation in receipt of the training grant must ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion is considered and supported at all stages throughout the performance of the Training Grant.

Panel recruitment

- Whilst panel members are appointed first and foremost based on expertise, we will aim to appoint a diverse panel membership. We will try to balance the panel by gender, ethnicity, geography and career stage to ensure a diversity of panel

members and institutions.

- We will ensure (if possible) that the chair and vice chair of the assessment panel are not the same gender.

Process

- All panel members will receive guidance which covers issues including fairness, objectivity and unconscious bias. This guidance will include a “safeguarding decision making” discussion, which includes a video prepared by the Royal Society on this topic.
- Panel members should be encouraged to feel empowered to constructively challenge potential bias where it is identified. The panel chair and panel secretary play a particularly important role in this respect. Expectations will be outlined at the beginning of each panel meeting which will set the tone for discussions and require that each panel member pay close attention to scoring criteria and definitions.
- For each proposal we will appoint two panel introducers who formally assess and score the proposal, with all panel members then asked to participate in discussions in order to ensure that an open and transparent assessment process is undertaken and a diverse range of views represented.

Protected Characteristic Group/ Additional factors	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	Negative	<p>Applicants should seek support from their own institution's research support office.</p> <p>Materials are all online so those with neuro-disabilities or who are visually/physically impaired may experience difficulties.</p> <p>Panel meeting attendees with neuro-disabilities may experience difficulties with concentration during the meeting.</p> <p>Potential for unconscious bias during the selection/interview process</p>	<p>See above under General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations.</p> <p>Work with Funding finder web team and TFS to produce content in accessible formats.</p> <p>Ensure adequate breaks are built into the agenda for panel meetings.</p> <p>Provide timely responses to questions. Information will also be shared via BBSRC and NERC networks.</p>
	Positive	<p>All materials are available online and accessible at any point during the call.</p> <p>Panel process will be held virtually, removing the need for those with impairments to travel.</p>	
Gender reassignment	Negative	<p>Potential for unconscious bias during the selection/interview process</p> <p>Use of non-gender-neutral language in guidance and assessment processes may present a barrier to participation for applicants (to the call and also to students applying for studentships).</p>	<p>See above under General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations.</p> <p>Ensure the usage of gender-neutral language within the funding opportunity and all associated documentation. UKRI expects TGHs to check their communications and guidance for applicants to ensure gender neutrality and inclusive language, as per the NERC best practice</p>

			guidelines and the BBSRC EDI action plan.
Marriage or civil partnership	Negative	Potential for unconscious bias during the selection/interview process	See above under General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations.
Pregnancy and Maternity (Paternity)	Negative	Call closes within or doesn't account for public and school holidays	Publish a clear timeline which is long enough to allow responses and accounts for public and school holidays (to include a pre-announcement stage of the funding opportunity).
		Individuals with childcare/other caring responsibilities may have less time to prepare applications or attend meetings	Provide as much notice as possible for the funding opportunity. The timing of meetings can be adjusted to accommodate applicants/panel members who have childcare responsibilities at certain times of the day. We will seek to schedule panel meetings at a time that would avoid requiring additional childcare. Reimbursement of additional childcare costs (over and above normal working hours) if the meeting participant is otherwise unable to attend.
	Positive	Potential for unconscious bias during the selection/interview process	See above under General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations.
		Applicants and panel members who are pregnant or have childcare responsibilities and unable travel will be able to participate remotely	Provide as much notice as possible for the funding opportunity, including the use a pre-announcement stage to allow extra time for community response. Gather information from meeting participants about any additional requirements they may need in order to fully participate in the virtual panel. Panel members may turn off their camera if they need to breastfeed. Panel to schedule regular and adequate breaks.

			Schedule to avoid early and late hours (e.g., not starting before 9:00 or finishing after 17:00).
Race	Negative	Potential for unconscious bias during the selection/interview process	See above under General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations.
Religion or belief	Negative	Call closes/panel held within religious observances	Publish a clear timeline which is long enough to allow responses and avoids/doesn't include or close within religious observances, as far as possible. In addition, this needs to be considered when determining panel dates.
		Potential for unconscious bias during the selection and panel process	See above under General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations.
Sexual orientation	Negative	Potential for unconscious bias during the selection and panel process	See above under General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations.
Sex (gender)	Negative	Potential for unconscious bias during the selection and panel process	See above under General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations.
	Positive	People with caring responsibilities (which falls disproportionately on women) may have less time to prepare a proposal, attend a panel meeting/programme event. Potential panellists who have caring responsibilities are less likely to be disadvantaged and can participate virtually.	Keep the Call open as long as possible (taking into consideration school holidays) to provide enough time to prepare proposals and give participants the opportunity to attend panel meetings/other events virtually. Provide early warning of planned meetings/events wherever possible. Accommodate any requirements panellists may need in order to fully participate in the panel process. Schedule regular breaks into the agenda and avoid early and late hours (i.e., not starting before 09:00 or finishing after 17:00)
Age	Negative	Potential for unconscious bias during the selection and panel process	See above under General Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations.

		<p>Applications are invited from researchers of all career stages. Panels may be inclined to look more favourably at late career researchers with a more established track record.</p>	<p>Panels are reminded to assess applications for their merit against the assessment criteria and not to introduce bias by considering age of applicant and team members.</p>
<p>Additional aspects (not covered by a protected characteristic)</p>			

Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the proposed policy or activity or change in policy or activity could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?		
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	✓	The assessment process for the doctoral landscape award funding opportunity has considered aspects of bias and clear steps/guidance have been taken to mitigate this at each stage.
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* Yes/Not required (*EIA's should be published alongside relevant funding activities e.g. calls and events:	Yes
Date completed:	10/01/24
Review date (if applicable):	

Change log

Name	Date	Version	Change
	When published	1	

