

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 safeguard 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
1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed	Embedded Digital Researchers
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is inviting applications from well-established UK-based academic researchers for embedded placements with non-academic host organisations. • The Embedded Researchers will facilitate the development and use of transformative technologies (AI, Digital Twinning, Engineering Biology, Quantum or Autonomous Systems) across the arc of the digital environment (from data acquisition to decision support tools) to support environmental solutions in non-academic host organisations. This will enable wider use of transformative technology in business, policy and third sector organisations. Through this process, the embedded researchers will also catalyse further activity between academic, non-academic organisations and NERC led activities. • Each researcher can apply for up to £50,000K for projects lasting no more than six months. • Successful projects must begin on or before 12th November 2021.
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)	The idea was developed over a very short time as required for spend ideas. It builds on positive feedback from the community around this type of call (e.g. from the similar Climate Resilience SPF Embedded Researcher call in 2020).
4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?	The exchange of knowledge will benefit those involved, including the academic researchers, the host organisations more widely, the academic researchers own organisations as well as NERC more widely due to wider integration with non-academic organisations.
5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?	Reports and final expenditure statements will be submitted from the successful parties. Integration with the CDE SPF expert network and wider NERC activities to draw synergies and catalyse further activities. A dissemination event will be organised to share and evidence activity (as well as the reports).

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	Call – Potential for negative	Call – Those with visual impairments may find the electronic call documents and/or panel documents difficult to use. Dependant on accessibility of host organisations sites (if physical placement).	Call – Accessibility aids will be provided as far as possible and where relevant including, transcripts, paper copies of documentation and/or reader functions. Plain language will be used as far as possible and content for the website will be reviewed against latest accessibility guidelines. Option of partly or wholly virtual placement is part of the call.
Gender reassignment	none identified		
Marriage or civil partnership	none identified		
Pregnancy and maternity	Call – Potential for negative	Call – call and resulting window for research is short which may discourage applications from those who are pregnant or anticipating parental leave.	Call – timescales are tight however we will be as flexible as possible with the time restrictions provided to us.
Race	Call – Potential for negative	Call – the speed of the call may result in less time to develop collaborations for those not already working in the space and in addition use of traditional funding mechanism which includes risk of bias.	Call – Broader advertising will particularly focus on underrepresented groups, particularly newer networks. We will setup a collaboration forum will seek to support the development of new opportunities for underrepresented communities.
Religion or belief	none identified		
Sexual orientation	none identified		
Sex (gender)	Call – Potential for negative	Call – Potential for less participation based on perceptions of (and numbers of) women in	The opportunity will be advertised to a broad range of networks, particularly those

		digital career fields or accessibility of the call opportunity.	connected to underrepresented groups.
Age	Call – Potential for negative	Call – Potential for less participation based on bias around age of participants in a digital/technical activity.	Call - Accessibility aids will be provided as far as possible including, transcripts, paper copies of documentation and/or reader functions. Plain language will be used as far as possible and content for the website will be reviewed against latest accessibility guidelines.

Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the proposed policy or activity or change in policy or activity could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	All programme areas including the funding call and grant panel evaluation will be designed in a way so as to ensure that funded projects will not discriminate and/or offer sufficient levels of risk mitigation.	
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	Y	<p>NERC values equality, diversity, and inclusion across all its funding programmes, and actively encourages applications from researchers of all backgrounds.</p> <p>The pre-activity collaboration tool will serve to help people build connections and ideas. Everyone looking to participate is encouraged to use it and it will help those from underrepresented particularly to develop collaborations.</p>
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:	
Review date (if applicable):	

Change log

Name	Date	Version	Change
	When published	1	