

Equality Impact Assessment

Background document

Context

1. Driving improvement in equality, diversity and inclusion is an important part of Research England's mission to create and sustain conditions for a healthy and dynamic research and knowledge exchange system in English Universities. Equality, diversity and inclusion is vital for its own sake, and there is a wealth of evidence showing that more diverse communities are more effective.

2. In 2018, when it was first formed as a council within UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), Research England set out its principles and approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. In accordance this, Research England will continue to undertake Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) of its functions and policy, and where appropriate to act upon the findings of the assessments.

3. As part of our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, Research England is currently undertaking an EIA of our QR and formula-based research capital funding policy. An EIA is an evidence-based approach to help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation, or disadvantage any protected groups.

4. The EIA will support Research England to meet the statutory duties stipulated under the Equality Act 2010. The Act puts a duty on public sector bodies to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who do and do not share a protected characteristic (age; disability; gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation);
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share a protected characteristic.

5. Public bodies such as UKRI and HEIs must show due regard for this general duty both as employers and as providers of public services across all of their functions. It is referred to as the public sector equality duty (PSED).

6. While the UKRI Board is responsible for ensuring that the organisation complies with the PSED, as a council within UKRI and a key component of the research funding system Research England shares in UKRI's legal obligation to show due regard to the PSED. The EIA will be carried out in support of our PSED.

7. The EIA will:

- Inform our understanding of the potential impact of our decisions on groups of people with different protected characteristics;
- Provide evidence to inform policy so that it meets the needs of a diverse population;

- Help us to ensure that considerations of equality and diversity are embedded within our practice;
 - Help us to explore the potential for positive impact, highlighting good practice and ways in which we may be able to make better use of our QR funding policy to advance equality of opportunity.
8. The EIA will also help Research England to:
- Better understand potential issues of equality, diversity and inclusion;
 - Explore the positive impacts of QR funding upon EDI and highlight areas of good practice;
 - Explore how we might mitigate any negative impacts of QR funding upon EDI;
 - Use our findings to develop robust evidence-based policy/practice.

QR and formula-based research capital funding

9. Research England distributes the majority of its funds for research on the basis of research quality, taking into account the volume and relative cost of research in different areas. This is called 'quality-related research (QR) funding'. Research England also allocates formula-based research capital funding to sustain and develop the facilities and infrastructure that underpin research and enhance the research environment at English HEIs.

10. Research England recognises that as an unhypothecated funding stream, QR and formula-based research capital play a key role in supporting and empowering the research base and, once allocated, funds are deployed by universities depending on their individual priorities. It gives institutions independence because they can use the funds for their own research priorities and it is not directed to particular research programmes. It also ensures that universities drive innovation, invest in new and emerging areas, grow and support new talent, and protect important research areas.

11. To assess the quality of research for funding purposes, we and the other UK funding bodies run a periodic assessment exercise. The most recent was the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014). The results of the REF have been used to determine funding from academic year 2015-16 onwards. The REF is subject to an iterative equality impact assessment and underpinned by a strong commitment to the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.

12. The principles of QR funding are:

- We allocate funding selectively by reference to robust judgements of research quality;
- We fund research of the highest quality wherever (and in whichever discipline) it is found;
- Our allocation process is robust and transparent, based upon clearly defined criteria and avoiding undue complexity.

13. In Academic Year (AY) 2018-19 Research England distributed £1.6 billion QR funding and over £180m of formula-based capital research funding. It is vital that we

consider the needs of members of the research community who have the potential to benefit from this funding, and those who benefit from research, and make evidence-based decisions which are fair to all.

14. QR funding is awarded to English HEIs as a block grant, made up of a number of different elements:

- Mainstream QR. The allocation of this funding is based on:
 - i. volume of research (based on numbers of research-active staff as returned to the REF)
 - ii. the subject cost weights (reflecting, for example, the fact that laboratory-based research is more expensive than library-based research)
 - iii. the quality of research as measured in the REF.
- QR Research degree programme (RDP) supervision funding. This allocation reflects postgraduate research student numbers in departments that attract mainstream QR funding, the relative costs of the subjects they are studying, the quality of research (based on REF outcomes) and London weighting.
- QR Charity support funding. This is allocated to institutions in proportion to the research income they receive from charities via open-competition, based on a 4-year average of eligible data returned in the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) finance record.
- QR Business research element. This is allocated to institutions in proportion to the income they receive from business for research, based on a 4-year average of eligible data returned in the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) finance record.
- QR funding for National Research Libraries. This is additional support for five research libraries which are designated as being of national importance to the HE sector.

The Global Challenge Research Fund. QR GCRF is allocated in proportion to HEIs' mainstream QR allocations, including London weighting. Allocation is subject to the submission and approval of individual institution-level three year GCRF strategies that are ODA (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance) compliant.

15. Within our research funding, we also allocate formula-based research capital funding through the following streams:

- HEI Research Capital. We distribute this element in proportion to the sum of Research England QR funding and research income from other (non-Research Council) sources. Research Capital funding for AY 2018-19 was allocated in proportion to recurrent QR funding for 2016-17 and 2017-18 and research income from other (non-Research Council) sources for 2015-16 and 2016-17.
- Higher Education Research Capital (HERC). We distribute this element in proportion to research income from Research Councils, reflecting finance data for the most recent three years.

Approach

16. Research England will carry out its EIA for QR and formula-based research capital funding during the remainder of 2019. We will consider evidence to explore whether the way in which QR and formula-based research capital funding is calculated or distributed is affecting people with protected characteristics differently. This will help us to ensure that the policy is effective for different groups of people. In particular we will look at evidence with regard to the potential impact on equality, diversity and inclusion on:

- University staff (i.e. those who support or conduct research funded by the funding streams);
- Subjects and participants of research (i.e. individuals on whom funded research is conducted);
- Beneficiaries of research (i.e. individuals who benefit or may benefit from the research funded).

17. Alongside our internal consideration of the equality impact of the funding streams as set up above, Research England is providing a range of opportunities for the sector to engage with this process over the summer of 2019. Research England engagement activity includes:

- Invitation-only discussion workshops for HEIs in receipt of QR and formula research capital;
- Related online resources, including a slide-pack, available to all interested stakeholders;
- An online survey and related call for evidence to gather further information on the potential impacts of our funding policy on protected groups.

18. This engagement activity is intended to give sector representatives an opportunity to inform the outcome of the equality impact assessment. As part of this engagement activity, those in receipt of QR and formula research capital funding and other key stakeholders are invited to:

- Respond to the online survey which poses a short set of questions to elicit consideration of the potential positive and/or negative impacts on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) through QR and formula research capital funding;
- Provide independent documents and data that may inform the evidence review and assessment;
- Provide evidence that demonstrates positive and/or negative impacts on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) through QR and formula research capital funding;
- Provide evidence that addresses how positive impacts on EDI may be further explored;
- Source evidence that addresses how negative impacts or potential negative impacts on EDI may be removed or mitigated.

19. To note, this EIA applies to English HEIs eligible to receive research funding from Research England only. Representatives from universities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and other organisations impacted by the current funding allocation may also wish to provide supporting evidence that may be used to inform the outcomes of the EIA.

Working in partnership

20. Research England will continue to work with key partners across UKRI, the Office for Students, policy and the sector to collate and analyse data and evidence. This analysis will inform understanding and activity to further equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education research, knowledge exchange and innovation. We also work closely with the other UK funding bodies, although as noted above, this EIA will assess QR funding for English institutions only.

Further information

21. Further information is available from Helen Snaith or Claire Packman at EIA-engagement-2019@re.ukri.org, telephone [0117 931 7411](tel:01179317411).