

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Equitable Partnerships in Research Funding Applications

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1. Introduction

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) ensures fair treatment and opportunity for all.

- **Equality:**
 - means fairness: we must ensure that individuals, or groups of individuals, are not treated less favourably because of their protected characteristics.
 - means equality of opportunity: we must ensure that those who may be disadvantaged can get the tools they need to access the same, fair opportunities as their peers.
- **Diversity** is recognising, respecting and celebrating each other’s differences. A diverse environment is one with a wide range of backgrounds and mindsets, which allows for an empowered culture of creativity and innovation.
- **Inclusion** means creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued. An inclusive environment can only be created once we are aware of our unconscious biases, and have learned how to manage them.

Funders are increasingly asking for consideration of EDI and Equitable partnerships (where some of the research is to be conducted overseas) in funding applications and it is wise to consider these at an early stage in the preparation of a proposal so they can be embedded throughout the lifecycle of the project. In addition, the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework (REF 2028) will place increased emphasis on EDI (see Section 6 for more details).

This document provides the most recent EDI, Equitable partnerships and ethical research information from specific funders where it applies to applications. Unfortunately, at present, in most cases – EPSRC excepted – the guidelines detailing funders’

Protected characteristics

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Protected in law under The Equality Act, 2010

expectations from applicants are vague and unclear. The UKCDR and European/overseas funders have been requesting this information for some time and so have clearer instructions for applicants.

We recommend looking at the EPSRC guidelines for EDI and the UKCDR/EU/ODA guidelines for Equitable partnerships even if these are outwith your discipline or do not apply to your application.

Equitable Partnerships are fundamental to conducting research internationally in a responsible manner and researchers should take steps to ensure that research partnerships are undertaken in a way that is mutually beneficial to all partners and recognises and mitigates against power imbalances.

2. UKRI and individual councils

UKRI [[UKRI EDI Strategy](#)]

Four high-level objectives, of which three can be applied to funding proposals (more info is on each slide):

1. Foster a world-class research and innovation system, 'by everyone, for everyone'

This is mainly about innovative approaches, partnerships, valuing diverse roles

2. Include and support a diversity of people and ideas through our funding and partnerships [see the slide for more details]

This is about considering diversity in the impact of research, participation in research, working in partnership

[Objective 3 is really a UKRI inward-looking objective]

4. Advance and grow knowledge and capability to support a thriving research and innovation system by being a creative, evidence-based and evidence-informed organisation

Collecting, measuring and evaluating EDI data to support inclusive decision making and enhance research and innovation

Equitable partnerships [[Research in a global setting – UKRI](#)] this document lists key principles, provides links to external guidance and also examples of good practice for researchers. The individual research councils do not appear to have their own policies on this. A more detailed document can be found under UKCDR below.

Ethical research [[UKRI position statement on funding ethical research – UKRI](#) updated 23/06/23] outlines high-level ethical principles drawn from existing UKRI policy and guidance. It is consistent with, and does not replace, existing ethical guidance produced by the individual research councils where more detailed remit- and discipline-specific information can be found. The responsibility for detailed ethical scrutiny and approval lies with the relevant organisation undertaking the research.

AHRC [[AHRC equality, diversity and inclusion action plan – UKRI](#)]

Looks at both the AHRC as an organisation as well as the research it funds.

BBSRC [[BBSRC EDI Strategy \(ukri.org\)](#)]

Based on the four objectives in the UKRI strategy. Has clear actions, examples and expected outcomes for each of the four objectives. Specific objectives to address under-representation of black and disabled researchers in BBSRC programmes, peer review and policy groups, and to invest in early career programmes to support under-represented and disadvantaged groups.

EPSRC [[EPSRC-091222-epsrc3YearEDIActionPlan2022-2025.pdf \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/publications/epsrc-091222-epsrc3YearEDIActionPlan2022-2025.pdf)]

By far the most detailed policy. Five-point action plan (see below), expanded bullet points in the document under each of these headings with expected outcomes, in progress, near term, medium term objectives.

Action set 1. Foster an inclusive and diverse research system and work in partnership with our community to support them

Action set 2. Embed inclusive practices in the way we work to reduce inequities across our portfolio and improve trust

Action set 3. Encourage and enable participation in engineering and physical sciences research careers through embedding EDI practice in our portfolio and the wider research community

Action set 4. Increase diversity of voice in our advisory groups

Action set 5. Investigating the barriers to greater access and participation to provide better support for people in our community

Key point for funding proposals in 2.7 (page 18) 'All EPSRC funding applications will allow appropriate budget requests for the implementation of EDI activities.' [This is coloured in blue which identifies it as 'New action that EPSRC will take the lead on']

Specific EDI guidance for researchers is presented in this document: **EPSRC Expectations for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** [<https://www.ukri.org/publications/epsrc-expectations-for-equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>]. A concise powerpoint published in March 2022 with numerous links to further information, other resources and – particularly helpful - examples from other universities/institutions for each of the expectations. This is by far the most comprehensive and useful document produced by a funder and is an essential resource for every researcher regardless of their subject/discipline.

ESRC [[ESRC equality, diversity and inclusion living action plan 2023 to 2025 – UKRI](#)]

Same four headline objectives as UKRI, but with different specific objectives below. Those relating directly to funding are:

2.2 improve access to funding and support for under-represented groups

2.4 develop our investments as exemplars for best practice by championing inclusive research design and inclusive teams

MRC [[Equality, diversity and inclusion – MRC – UKRI](#)]

They state they are currently developing an EDI strategy (May 2023), although EDI is a key priority.

The 'Black in Biomedical Research project' [[MRC 'Black in Biomedical Research' Advisory Group – UKRI](#)] is led by an advisory group of 16 academics/medics from UK universities but UoR does not have a representative on the panel. £3.7 million has been committed between 2023 and 2025 to support activities including:

- Early-career research support for Black biomedical postdoctoral scientists or researchers who want to make the transition to becoming an academic or a PI
- Partnering with the Sanger Excellence Fellowship scheme

NERC [[NERC diversity and inclusion living action plan 2022 to 2025 – UKRI](#)]

More detailed than the UKRI strategy, but the objectives really only apply to NERC itself, and it is difficult to see how they could be applied to a funding proposal. The focus generally seems to be on partnership and inclusion.

These objectives arose from a series of roundtable discussions between NERC and researchers in June 2021: [Advancing equity, diversity and inclusivity in the environmental sciences – UKRI](#) (August 2021).

From the 'Climate consequences of rapid ocean changes' (published 23/05/23):

Equality, diversity and inclusion

NERC is committed to achieving equity of opportunity for all funding applicants. We encourage applications from a diverse range of researchers.

We support people to work in a way that suits their personal circumstances. This includes:

- career breaks
- support for people with caring responsibilities
- flexible working
- alternative working patterns

Find out more about [equality, diversity and inclusion at UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) and [NERC's diversity and inclusion action plan](#).

Trusted research and innovation

UKRI is committed in ensuring that effective international collaboration in research and innovation takes place with integrity and within strong ethical frameworks. Trusted research and innovation is a UKRI work programme designed to support cross-sector campaigns that protect all those working in our thriving and collaborative international sector.

Our [trusted research and innovation principles](#) set out UKRI's expectations of organisations funded by UKRI in relation to due diligence for international collaboration.

You are encouraged to read these principles and should familiarise yourself with the resources referenced in our trusted research and innovation guidance, to get the most out of international collaboration while protecting intellectual property, sensitive research and personal information.

NIHR [[Equality, diversity and inclusion | NIHR](#)]

Full strategy document here [[Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2027 | NIHR](#)].

Five themes of which the following apply to research funding:

Theme One: Become a more inclusive funder of research

- Develop frameworks for inclusive research design and infrastructure
- Encourage funding applicants to reconsider the role of inclusion and show their commitment to developing and maintaining a healthy research culture

Theme Two: Widen access and participation for greater diversity and inclusion

Equitable partnerships: NIHR is the only UK research council (below UKRI) to specifically mention this. This page [[Equitable Partnerships Guide | NIHR](#)] provides links to documents from other organisations (such as UKCDR) and states ‘We do not promote any particular organisations or values relating to the information provided, and individuals and teams are encouraged to review these resources and apply what is useful or relevant to them’.

STFC [[STFC equality, diversity and inclusion action plan 2022 to 2023 – UKRI](#)]

Follows the UKRI strategy, and is mainly inward-looking, but the following points relate to research and funding:

- Engage with our research communities on the forward development of our EDI activities
- National skills agenda/early careers skills pipeline: undertake a campaign to improve diversity within the cohort
- Improve diversity in the early career researchers:
 - Participate in the national 10,000 Black Interns scheme or develop or participate in an equivalent scheme
 - Encourage diverse recruitment in PhD studentship by sharing best practice from across UKRI with all doctoral investments
 - Encourage diverse recruitment across all doctoral investments by monitoring centre for doctoral training progress on actions to encourage a wide range of talented applicants
 - Review EDI aspects of our current fellowships process

3. Other major UK funders

British Academy [[Equality, diversity and inclusion at the British Academy | The British Academy](#)]

Undertook a review in 2019/2020 and as a result has drawn up an EDI action plan and initiated a number of workstreams, one of which will address research funding. No further information Oct 2023.

British Council [[Equality, diversity and inclusion | British Council](#)]

Has both a policy [[equality_policy_2022.pdf \(britishcouncil.org\)](#)] (this is mainly inward-looking) and a strategy [[Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021 \(britishcouncil.org\)](#)] (also very inward-looking, nothing specific about funding proposals).

No policy on equitable partnerships but they are discussed in these article [International higher education partnerships and the SDGs report - launch event 12 Jan 2022 | British Council](#) and [Going Global Partnerships: comprehensive new set of grants to be launched | British Council](#)

British Heart Foundation [[igniting-change.pdf \(bhf.org.uk\)](#)]

Has a 7 point plan which includes:

4. Encouraging inclusivity in how research funding decisions are made, and how BHF funded research is designed

- will be reviewing over the next 3 years how to address unconscious bias in funding decisions and to create more diverse decision makes

- we will ask that research conducted under the BHF's grant schemes gives appropriate consideration to increasing diversity within clinical trials (e.g. among clinical trial participants, population cohorts) in the design of laboratory or other pre-clinical research (e.g. diversity in the sources of clinical samples, cells or animals)

5. Achieving a more representative and inclusive heart and circulatory disease community

we will proactively engage with, and learn from, our research community, NHS trainees and staff, and external experts to tackle bias and remove barriers to cardiovascular careers, funding, and career progression. For example, through listening sessions and focus groups

we will support underrepresented groups of researchers in cardiovascular research wishing to network or develop their careers using our small meetings grant fund

we will involve and spotlight BHF-funded researchers from all backgrounds and career stages in the BHF's public engagement activities, including early and mid-career grant recipients

we will expect institutions we fund to have appropriate policies in place to improve equity, diversity and inclusion, including to close gender and ethnicity pay gaps, if present, and to champion a positive research culture, free from bullying and harassment

Cancer Research [[Cancer Research UK EDI Strategy 2021-23](#)]

Launched a charity-wide EDI strategy in January 2021 with a really clear vision, strategic priorities and fundamental principles. Priorities that relate to research funding include:

Priority 2. Develop a more diverse and inclusive research community through the research we fund

With the following initiatives:

- c. Prioritise initiatives to improve success rates for ethnic minority grant applicants and to remove barriers for grant applicants disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic when we review applications.
- d. Implement targeted career support for ethnic minority researchers and remove barriers so the best researchers can progress in cancer research.

Leverhulme Trust [[Equality, diversity and inclusion and our mission | The Leverhulme Trust](#)]

Short list of priorities which includes:

- We will encourage a more diverse group of academics to apply for our grants
- We will continue with our applicant focused flexible approach

Royal Society [[Grants policies and positions | Royal Society](#)]

Published policies on the following for their research grants, i.e. fellowships, etc, which includes:

- Childcare Travel [[Childcare Travel Policy](#)]
- Dignity and respect [[Dignity and Respect](#)]
- Equality and diversity
- Flexible working and leave [[Flexible working and leave](#)]

Also launched funding specifically for underrepresented groups in STEM (Black or Mixed Black African, Black Caribbean or other Black heritage background) [[Career Development Fellowship](#)].

Wellcome Trust [[Diversity and inclusion programme strategy | Wellcome](#)]

Has specific sections on funding [[Diversity and inclusion programme strategy | Wellcome](#)] and inclusive research design and practice [[Diversity and inclusion programme strategy | Wellcome](#)]

UKCDR (UK Collaborative on Development Research)

Collective of UK-based funders which supports global development. Equitable partnerships policy [[Equitable partnerships | UKCDR](#)] and Resource Hub [[Equitable Partnerships Resource Hub | UKCDR](#)]

Four approaches to supporting Equitable partnerships in research [[Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Research Partnerships | UKCDR](#)] has been written for funders, research institutions and researchers. It provides great insight into what funders expect from the research they support. Tables show at a glance where responsibility lies for specific actions: i.e. with funder/research institution/researcher. Useful case studies with 'lessons learned' too.

Also Safeguarding – preventing from harm [[Safeguarding – prevention from harm | UKCDR](#)]

4. European funders

ERC

[Working Group on Gender and Diversity | ERC \(europa.eu\)](#) and [ERC Gender Equality Plan 2021-2027](#) which introduces:

- Parental leave eligibility is extended by 18 months per child for female applicants
- Female ERC grantees are asked to showcase their ERC-funded research to promote female participation and encourage more women to apply
- The model grant agreement binds the ERC beneficiary to promote gender equality at all levels of personnel
- [Gender actions and gender data](#) on applicants and trainees

Grant evaluators are encouraged to undergo unconscious bias training.

[Working Group on Widening European Participation | ERC \(europa.eu\)](#) – the purpose is to capitalize on the full potential for frontier research in Europe without departing from the ERC’s principle of excellence. The aim is to strengthen participation of researchers in ERC calls from regions which undertake less research by facilitating an Europe-wide dialogue, exchange of experiences, networking and learning about good practices in supporting the best researchers to successfully apply. Also, includes systematic debate and interactions with relevant national stakeholders in weak participating regions by advising them on and promoting the local support for their most promising scientists.

EU

Gender equality statement [[Gender equality in research and innovation \(europa.eu\)](#)] and strategy [[Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#)]

Horizon Europe [[Gender equality in research and innovation \(europa.eu\)](#)]

Gender equality has been made a cross-cutting priority with strengthened provisions, via:

1. Having a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) in place is now an eligibility criterion for certain categories of legal entities from EU countries and non-EU countries associated to Horizon Europe
2. The integration of a gender dimension into research and innovation content is a requirement by default, and evaluated under the excellence criterion, unless the topic description explicitly specifies otherwise
3. Increasing gender balance throughout the programme is another objective, with a target of 50% women in Horizon Europe related boards, expert groups and evaluation committees, and gender balance among research team set as a ranking criterion for proposals with the same score

Some funding has been ringfenced for projects in specific areas relating to gender equality.

Full details are here [Horizon Europe, gender equality - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

5. Overseas funders

See also UKCDR in section 3

Official Development Assistance (ODA)

ODA funding applications require various statements to be included in their proposal and the University has prepared these (see links below). These are:

- Gender Equality [[Equality Diversity and Inclusion - Gender Equality \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)]
- Equitable Partnerships [[Equitable Partnerships \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)]

6. Research Excellence Framework 2028

Research England have recently outlined a number of changes that have been made to the REF 2028: the Environment component of REF 2021 will be replaced by a new People, Culture and Environment section. It will count for 25% of the total score (increased from 15%) and will be assessed at both an institutional and disciplinary level.

Research England state this ‘sends a strong message of support for, and expectations on, higher education institutions to create, sustain and reward a positive and inclusive research ecosystem [[Research Professional - REF 2028 changes send ‘strong message’ on equality](#)].

7. Guidance documents on including EDI and Equitable Partnerships

It is important to consider EDI and EP (if applicable) at the outset of designing your research. This way, EDI and EP principles will be applied throughout and embedded within the project. We understand that this is what funders are really looking for.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) funders have given priority to EDI for many years and so there is a wealth of guidance in the ODA section of the Research Services website:

Gender equality [[Equality Diversity and Inclusion - Gender Equality \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)] with a clear explanation and links to the following resources:

- Planning your research: UKRI’s Things to consider: incorporating gender equality into international development research and innovation [[UKRI-250221-Things-to-consider-incorporating-gender-equality-into-international-research-and-innovation.pdf](#)] and Oxfam’s guidelines [[Integrating Gender in Research Planning \(openrepository.com\)](#)]
- UoR’s Guidance on developing an EDI statement [[gender_equality_guidance.pdf \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)] and University of Edinburgh’s Toolkit for developing for gender equality statement (although this is specifically for Global Challenges Research Fund, it can be applied to other applications) [[toolkit_developing_your_gcrf_gender_equality_statement8.pdf \(ed.ac.uk\)](#)]
- Oxford University’s Best practice guide on developing inclusive conferences [[190522_Inclusive_Conference_Guide.pdf \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)]

Equitable partnerships [[Equitable Partnerships \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)] with graphics explaining the concepts and links to the following resources:

- [Research in a global setting – UKRI](#)

- [Equitable Partnerships in International Research - Action Against Stunting Hub](#) (recorded presentation)
- [Equitable Partnerships Resource Hub | UKCDR](#)

8. University of Reading

University statement and policies

The University's statement of commitment to diversity with action plan up to 2026 [[Our commitment to diversity \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)], Diversity and Inclusion Team [[Diversity and Inclusion Team \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)], Diversity Champions [[Diversity champions \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)] and Annual Diversity and Inclusion reports [[Annual reports \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)]

Policies [[Policies and procedures \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)] includes:

- Equal Opportunities
- Code of Good Practice (Valuing Ourselves and Others)
- Harassment and Bullying Policies and Procedures
- Trans and Gender Identity: Supporting information and Procedures for Staff/Students
- Family Leave Procedures and Guidance (including Maternity, Shared Parental and Adoption Leave)
- Provision of Gender Neutral Toilets

For staff [Diversity homepage \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)

For students [Diversity and Inclusion | University of Reading](#) and [Inclusion Consultants | University of Reading](#)

For all members of the university: [the Diversity and Inclusion Community of Interest and the Diversity and Inclusion Community of Practice](#), a blog [#DiverseReading | Discussions about equality, diversity and inclusion from the University of Reading, UK](#), the Employers' Network for Equality and Inclusion [Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion - Register \(enei.org.uk\)](#) – the UoR is a member and anyone with a UoR email can access a wealth of resources on EDI in the workplace, and six diversity networks:

- BAME
- LGBT+
- Parent and Family, including a new Fathers' Channel launched in November 2023
- Staff Disability Plus (only open to staff, not students)
- women@reading
- Women's Springboard Network

School/Department-specific policies

- [Equality, diversity and wellbeing - School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, University of Reading](#)
- [Equality, diversity and Inclusion - School of the Built Environment at the University of Reading](#)

- [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Henley | Henley Business School](#)
- [Wellbeing, Inclusion, Diversity and Equality. \(reading.ac.uk\)](#) [School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences]

Charter marks

There are a number of charter marks awarded when the university has met specific criteria in EDI.

Athena SWANN (encouraging and recognising commitment to advancing gender equality)

We hold Athena SWANN [[Athena Swan Charter | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](#)] awards in all of our science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) schools, the majority at Silver level:

- School of Agriculture, Policy and Development (Bronze Award)
- School of the Built Environment (Silver Award)
- School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences (Silver Award)
- School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences (Silver Award)
- School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy (Silver Award)
- School of Politics, Economics and International Relations (Bronze Award)

Race Equality Charter

The University has been a member since 2016 and is currently working towards achieving its charter mark.

University's LGBT+ Action Group

Terms of reference [Knowledge Hub - Business Disability Forum](#)

Action Plan [lgbt-plus-action-plan-2019-v9.pdf \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)

New University-wide LGBT+ Allyship Training course introduced in June 2023 [[IDAHoBiT flag raising and LBGT Plus allyship training - University of Reading](#)]. In addition, during 2023 the university is working with Stonewall in their strategic review of the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (which it was a former member of).

Investors in People

- The University of Reading (Silver, 2014)
- Estates and Facilities (Gold, 2015)

Members of

- Employers network for equality and inclusion
- Business Disability Forum [[Knowledge Hub - Business Disability Forum](#)]

9. Examples of EDI consideration/good practice

To follow

10. Next steps?

In biological sciences, discuss possibility of joining Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Science and Health (EDIS) with the Research Deans. EDIS [[Home - EDIS \(edisgroup.org\)](https://edisgroup.org)] is a coalition of organisations working to improve the equality, diversity and inclusion within the science and health research sector, originally established by The Francis Crick Institute research centre, independent funder Wellcome Trust and commercial partners GlaxoSmithKline. Membership of this organisation would add credibility to UoR's EDI claims in biomedical sciences. Membership fees are based on the number of employees.

11. Further reading

EDI

[Equality, diversity and inclusion in 2019: the good, the bad and the bigoted | Royal Society](#) – opinion piece

[Research Professional - Researcher body demands more support for mothers](#) – news article

[How we're putting culture, diversity and inclusion at the heart of our strategy | Wellcome](#) (2021)

[“Go for it!”: Empowering women and girls in STEM can help solve world's biggest challenges | UKCDR](#) – blog post (2021)

[Equity, diversity and inclusion are foundational research skills | Nature Human Behaviour](#) (June 2022)

[Learning from the leaders of organisations that support Black researchers | News | Wellcome](#) – news article (June 2023)

[MRC urges researchers to consider diversity in experiments – UKRI](#) (June 2023)

[Embedding diversity in research design – MRC – UKRI](#) (June 2023)

[Research Professional - ‘Profound lack’ of Black scientists in cancer research](#) (July 2023)

Toolkit for integrating a gender-sensitive approach to research and checklist for preparing the gender equality statement for grant applications to UKRI GCRF and Newton Fund calls
[wcid_gender_toolkit.pdf \(warwick.ac.uk\)](#)

[Research Professional - Diversity, equity and inclusion: Pushing back against pushback](#) (Oct 2023)

[Research Professional – Research England appoints first EDI advisory group](#) (Oct 2023)

Equitable partnerships

[Equitable partnerships: Lessons from practitioners | UKCDR](#) – blog post

[Developing partnerships | Nature](#) – editorial (2015)

[Rethinking research partnerships: discussion guide and toolkit - Christian Aid](#) (2017)

[Developing a framework for successful research partnerships in global health | SpringerLink](#) (2016)

[Race and inequality in international development research: a UKCDR perspective | UKCDR](#) – blog post (2020)

[Research Professional - Partnerships ‘need respect, trust and aligned interests’](#) (June 2023)

[Research Professional - From the archive: Partnerships for the planet](#) (republished June 2023)