

Equality Impact Assessment

Title of policy being assessed	Research England Sector Engagement Strategy
Policy Owner	Kim Seth
Directorate	Insight and Engagement
EIA lead	Jill Downey
EIA team	Insight and Engagement Team
EIA Commenced	2025
EIA Completed	2030
EIA due for review on:	2027
Publication date	2025

Question	Response
1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed	Research England Sector Engagement Strategy (referred to below as the strategy)
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gather real-time nuanced intelligence from universities to guide our actions and influence policy development. 2. Use our engagement with universities to augment evidence on the health and dynamism of the research and innovation system in England. 3. Demonstrate that public funds are being used appropriately and highlight the contribution our funding makes through the intelligence we gather from the sector. 4. Ensure that our engagement is inclusive and that analysis is objective.
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing feedback via engagement with universities and sector groupings over the past six years. • Feedback and challenge from RE Executive on 23rd October 2023, RE Senior Leadership Team on 4th November 2024 and RE Council on 21st November 2024. • Feedback from the Insight and Engagement Team planning day on 28th November 2023.

<p>4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?</p>	<p>The internal stakeholders are primarily RE's Senior Leadership Team, research and knowledge exchange policy leads and Council members, all of whom are users of the intelligence gathered through engagement.</p> <p>Wider stakeholders across UKRI include the other Research Councils, Innovate UK, the Talent Team, the Research Integrity, Culture and Environment Team, and working groups for specific areas of work, such as financial sustainability and place, with whom anonymised intelligence is shared.</p> <p>Anonymised intelligence is shared in the form of briefings for government departments, special advisers, policy-makers and ministers.</p> <p>External stakeholders are the English universities in receipt of RE funding: engagement with these institutions and sector representative groups is the direct subject of the strategy.</p>
<p>5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?</p>	<p>The strategy covers six academic years from 2024-25 to 2029-30. It will be reviewed in 2027, seeking input from internal and external stakeholders in light of the evaluation questions set out in the strategy.</p> <p>The Insight and Engagement Team will gather and analyse information and soft intelligence gleaned from engagement activities, tracking the progress of the strategy, assessing its impact and measuring its success. Key indicators of success include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far engagement intelligence has informed the development of future higher education policies; • Whether engagement has provided an early warning system about changes or risks in the sector; • How useful intelligence has been to senior leaders and policy-makers in RE, UKRI and government.

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	Not directly	<p>The strategy is focused on engagement with universities and groups representing different cohorts of the higher education sector, rather than individuals with protected characteristics.</p> <p>However, RE recognises and takes account of inequalities inherent in the HE system, as set out below, and our approach to engagement will reflect that awareness.</p> <p>As the primary purpose of our engagement is to gather intelligence that informs policy and decision-making, the strategy may indirectly have a positive impact on some protected groups. This type of positive impact cannot be directly or solely attributed to the strategy, but we hope that our engagement may contribute to policies that drive greater equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education.</p>	<p>Although there is no adjustment to the strategy, our approach to engagement will pay due regard to the range of equality issues and challenges affecting the HE sector, including the low representation of women and ethnic minorities in senior leadership positions, the precarity of career pathways for early career researchers, the lack of diversity in the research pipeline, and the need for a more inclusive research culture. We will share intelligence about the barriers faced by under-represented or disadvantaged groups in university research communities in order to shape future higher education policy.</p>
Gender reassignment	Not directly		
Marriage or civil partnership	Not directly		
Pregnancy and maternity	Not directly		
Race	Not directly		
Religion or belief	Not directly		
Sexual orientation	Not directly		
Sex (gender)	Not directly		
Age	Not directly		

Context for the table above:

Although RE's engagement of universities, as set out in the strategy, does not have a direct impact on people with the protected characteristics listed above, we recognise that there are inequalities inherent in higher education, reflective of our wider society. The under or over-representation of some protected characteristics in research communities and in university

leadership is of particular interest to RE. Examples include where women are under-represented in STEM research or in senior leadership positions, where personal or family circumstances prevent researchers from delivering the expected outputs, or where there are barriers to the development of research careers for younger people or other cohorts.

RE is also interested in understanding more about other types of inequity or under-representation in the sector, including where certain areas of research may be disadvantaged due to under-representation or where the cost or status associated with particular disciplinary areas has a disproportionate impact.

These issues have been and will continue to be part of the conversations we have with universities as part of our engagement strategy. They will subsequently form part of the intelligence that we distil from our engagement activities, which will be used by colleagues to influence and shape policy-making. Over the long term, we intend that the intelligence gleaned through engagement will contribute towards improved policies and practices in research environments, ultimately making a positive difference for individuals with some protected characteristics.

In addition, we recognise that different types of institutions have different equality profiles. For example, universities with a strong focus on region and community may have larger proportions of BAME, mature or part-time students or students from deprived backgrounds and lower socio-economic groups. RE reinforces its commitment to engaging with a wide range of institutions, including smaller, specialist universities, and those who are less research-intensive but are nonetheless on a journey to grow their research. This strategy commits to a flexible approach so that our engagement of different types of institution can continue to be tailored.

In light of the above, we commit to paying due regard to equality, diversity and inclusion issues, which will be covered as part of core business during our visits to and conversations with universities.

While it does not directly impact, either positively or negatively, on individuals with protected characteristics, the strategy does pay due regard to inequalities in higher education and the diversity of the sector itself. It has the potential to indirectly influence policies that could in future have a positive impact on individuals with protected characteristics.

Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification
Is it possible the proposed policy or activity or change in policy or activity could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	The strategy will not discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people with protected characteristics. However, in light of the context described above, we recognise that different types of institution will have different experiences of RE’s engagement activities, based on our tailored approach and the different levels of research intensity across the sector.

Final Decision:	Tick the relevant box	Include any explanation / justification required
1. No barriers identified, therefore activity will proceed .	X	Please see the context described above.
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		
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. The aim is to publish this EIA in January 2025, alongside the Sector Engagement Strategy.
Date completed:	November 2024
Review date (if applicable):	2027

Change log

Name	Date	Version	Change
Jill Downey, Engagement Lead	July 2024	1	
	November 2024	2	Version 2 reflects input from RE Senior Leadership Team.
	November 2024	3	Version 3 reflects comments from RE Council.