

DEPARTMENT FOR THE ECONOMY

SECTION 75 EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY SCREENING TEMPLATE

This form should be completed when considering options for a new policy, service or programme, or changing an existing policy, service or programme. Those policies identified as having significant implications for equality of opportunity must be subject to full EQIA.

The template will provide a record of the factors taken into account if a policy is screened out, or excluded for EQIA. It will be included in the quarterly Screening Report which is published on the Department's website.

Please complete the Cover Sheet Table below

Policy Title (in full):	SFI Covid-19 Rapid Response Call
Policy Aim	<p>On 26 March 2020, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) launched an 'SFI Covid-19 Rapid Response Research & Innovation Funding Call', to deal with the many challenges from the current COVID-19 global crisis (see: https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/covid19-rapid-response/).</p> <p>Following receipt of 350 applications, SFI paused the call on 1st May 2020 to allow it to take stock of the range of proposals approved by the international peer review and possible gaps in provision. SFI is planning to relaunch the Call in June 2020 with a focus on more specific issues arising from the pandemic. As part of the re-launched call, SFI has indicated that it is keen to include particular "all-island" themes in a bilateral approach with DfE.</p> <p>It is proposed that DfE provide funding of up to £2.6m to allow Northern Ireland (NI) universities to collaborate with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland (RoI), where they make a successful joint bid to this SFI Funding Call. This will provide NI researchers with an important opportunity to engage with counterparts in RoI and potentially elsewhere in order to increase their potential to make significant and impactful breakthroughs that will address the manifold challenges posed in the UK, Ireland and beyond by the COVID-19 virus.</p> <p>In the broader context, it is well established that international collaboration enables researchers to work with global experts in their field, enhancing the quality and efficiency of their outputs, while building domestic capacity and skills. By bringing together international talent and resources we can achieve faster progress on shared challenges, resulting in more innovative and impactful outcomes.</p>

	<p>Promotion of international collaboration in science, research and innovation contributes to a range of Northern Ireland and UK strategic policy objectives, and is an area of particular interest in the context of EU Exit.</p> <p>Under the Draft Northern Ireland Industrial Strategy, Economy 2030, the Department has an action to “<i>Establish new international research and development partnerships to build on the success of initiatives such as the US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership Programme</i>”. This proposed intervention, although short-term and urgent, would fall under this category, building on the already well-established relationship DfE has with SFI. Indeed, the invitation from SFI to participate in this urgent response to COVID-19 is a reflection of the strength of this relationship, which has been developed over the last two decades in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement (1998).</p> <p>In terms of the draft Programme for Government (PfG), promoting international collaboration in science, research and innovation is likely to have a direct and significant impact on Outcomes 1 and 5:</p> <p><i>1. We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy</i></p> <p><i>5. We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential</i></p> <p>The importance of international collaboration has been specifically recognised in the Outcomes Delivery Plan in relation to Outcome 1.</p>
Decision (delete as appropriate)	Policy screened out without mitigation or an alternative policy adopted
Business Area:	Higher Education Research and Knowledge Exchange Branch
Contact:	Boyd McDowell/Johanne McCullough
Date of form completion:	28 th May 2020

Screening flowchart and template

(taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (Appendix 1)).

Introduction

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

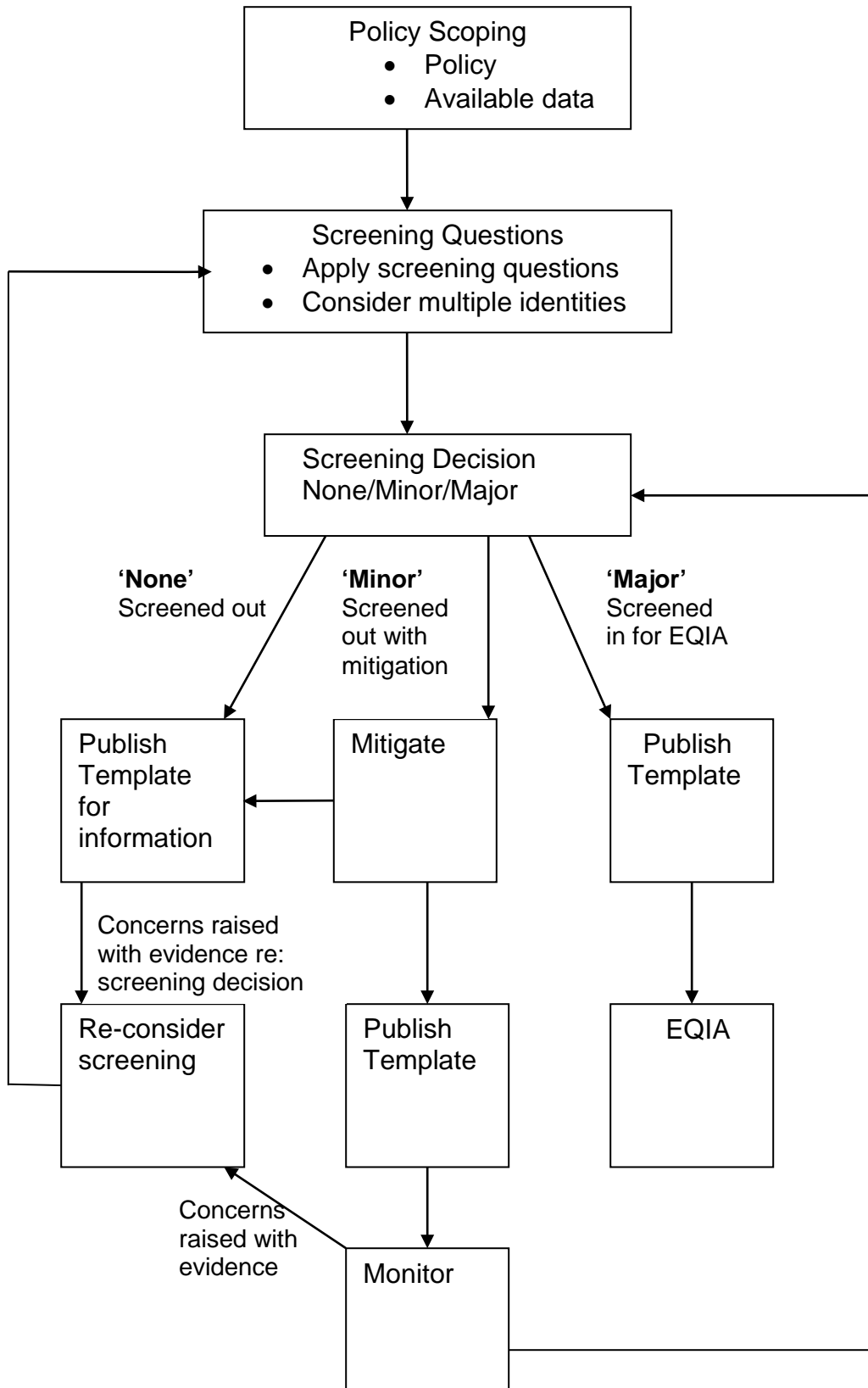
Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues.

Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Approval and authorisation – verifies the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

A screening flowchart is provided overleaf.



Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy
SFI Covid-19 Rapid Response Call
Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?
This is a new policy initiated in response to the Covid-19 crisis.
What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)
The aim of the policy is to provide NI researchers with an important opportunity to engage with counterparts in RoI and potentially elsewhere in order to increase their potential to make significant and impactful breakthroughs that will address the manifold challenges posed in the UK, Ireland and beyond by the COVID-19 virus.
Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?
No. The SFI call is open to all researchers whose project meets the remit of the funding stream. Bids or projects submitted to the funding call will be subject to international peer review. The agreement of funding will be with the NI University and not with the individual researcher. Therefore the policy does not impact directly on any of the Section 75 categories.
If so, explain how.
Who initiated or wrote the policy?
DfE initiated the policy in response to the Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) policy.(see:

<https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/covid19-rapid-response/>).

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The DfE policy owner will be Lynne Miskelly, Higher Education Research and Knowledge Exchange Branch. Boyd McDowell, as programme manager HERKEB will implement the policy.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

If yes, are they:

- financial
- legislative
- other - please specify

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon?

- staff
- service users
- other public sector organisations
- voluntary / community/trade unions
- other - please specify
QUB and Ulster University and NI researchers.

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

- what are they?
- who owns them?

The importance of both research and knowledge exchange is underlined in the **draft Programme for Government** and **Northern Ireland Industrial Strategy**.

Three of the draft Programme for Government outcomes clearly underline the importance of research and development:

- 1: "We prosper through a strong, competitive regionally-balanced economy"
- 5: "We are an innovative, creative society where people can fulfil their potential".
- 6: "We have more people working in better jobs"

The NI Industrial Strategy will be the primary vehicle for delivery against the PfG's economic indicators. The Strategy has a key milestone to increase the annual spend on R&D to £1.5 billion by 2030. The Strategy's first pillar, "Accelerating Innovation and Research", underlines the key importance of university R&D:

"Supporting our universities and research institutes to focus on research excellence has enabled Northern Ireland to be recognised as world class in a number of research fields. This has helped underpin economic growth, attracting high value foreign direct investment, enabling local businesses to develop and exploit new, cutting edge technologies leading to new products and services for global markets and providing a platform for the development of world-leading clusters. We must build on this and ensure that our universities and other institutes have the necessary support to deliver on their ambitions for research excellence."

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/ information
Religious belief	N/A. The SFI funding call is open to all researchers in Northern Ireland whose projects/bids meet the criteria. The bids will be selected by SFI on a competitive basis and subject to international peer review. The Department will agree to fund successful bids submitted by the NI Universities. The agreement of funding will be with the NI University and not with the individual researcher. Therefore the policy does not impact directly on any of the Section 75 categories.
Political opinion	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Racial group	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Age	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Marital status	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Sexual orientation	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Men and women generally	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Disability	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’

Dependants	N/A – see 'Religious belief'
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Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Religious belief	The aim of the policy is to provide funding for successful bids submitted by NI researchers from the NI universities to the SFI call. There is no evidence to suggest that researchers within this category need or utilise the scheme disproportionately.
Political opinion	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Racial group	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Age	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Marital status	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Sexual orientation	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Men and women generally	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Disability	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’
Dependants	N/A – see ‘Religious belief’

Part 2. Screening questions

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4 which are given on pages 10-12 of this Guide.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;

- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1 What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? minor/major/none		
Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
Religious belief	<p>No impact on equality of opportunity.</p> <p>This policy is applicable to all successful projects irrespective of the religious belief of the research team.</p>	none
Political opinion	<p>No impact on equality of opportunity.</p> <p>This policy is applicable to all successful projects irrespective of political opinion of the research team.</p>	None
Racial group	<p>No impact on equality of opportunity.</p> <p>This policy is applicable to all successful projects irrespective of race of the research team.</p>	None
Age	<p>No impact on equality of opportunity.</p> <p>This policy is applicable to all successful projects irrespective of the age of the members of the research team.</p>	none
Marital status	<p>No impact on equality of opportunity.</p> <p>This policy is applicable to all successful projects irrespective of marital status of the members of the research team.</p>	none

Sexual orientation	<p>No impact on equality of opportunity.</p> <p>This policy is applicable to all successful projects irrespective of the sexual orientation of the members of the research team.</p>	none
Men and women generally	<p>No impact on equality of opportunity.</p> <p>This policy is applicable to all successful projects irrespective of gender of the members of the research team.</p>	none
Disability	<p>No impact on equality of opportunity.</p> <p>This policy is applicable to all successful projects irrespective if the research team members have any disabilities.</p>	none
Dependants	<p>No impact on equality of opportunity.</p> <p>This policy is applicable to all successful projects irrespective of the number of dependants the members of the research team may have.</p>	none

2 Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?		
Section 75 category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Religious belief	N/A	No. This policy will enable DfE to support the successful bid submitted to the SFI funding call. Bids for funding are subject to peer review by SFI-appointed expert panels on a competitive basis.

Political opinion	N/A	as above
Racial group	N/A	as above
Age	N/A	as above
Marital status	N/A	as above
Sexual orientation	N/A	as above
Men and women generally	N/A	as above
Disability	N/A	as above
Dependants	N/A	as above

3 To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? minor/major/none		
Good relations category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact minor/major/none
Religious belief	N/A	None
Political opinion	N/A	None
Racial group	N/A	None

4 Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?		
Good relations category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Religious belief	N/A	No. This policy will enable the Department to support successful projects submitted by NI Universities to the SFI funding call. As a result, there are no opportunities to promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories i.e. not applicable as no direct impact.
Political opinion	N/A	as above

Racial group	N/A	as above
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Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

No

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

N/A

Part 3. Screening decision

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

The decision not to conduct an equality impact assessment in respect of this policy is because of the following:

This policy proposes that DfE provide funding of up to £2.6m to allow Northern Ireland (NI) universities to collaborate with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland (RoI), where they make a successful joint bid to this SFI Funding Call. This will provide NI researchers with an important opportunity to engage with counterparts in RoI and potentially elsewhere in order to increase their potential to make significant and impactful breakthroughs that will address the manifold challenges posed in the UK, Ireland and beyond by the COVID-19 virus.

Given that the bids will be assessed only on their technical merits by SFI, there is unlikely to be any adverse impact on any Section 75 groups.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced.

N/A

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

N/A

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

If so, give the **reasons** to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

N/A

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been '**screened in**' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	N/A
Social need	N/A
Effect on people's daily lives	N/A
Relevance to a public authority's functions	N/A

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

N/A

If yes, please provide details

N/A

Part 4. Monitoring

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

N/A

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by:	Position/Job Title	Date
J McCullough	Deputy Programme manager (SO)	28.5.2020
Approved by:		
L Miskelly	Grade 7 HERKEB	19.6.2020

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.