



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Equality Impact Assessment

EqIA covers policies, provisions, criteria, functions, practices and activities, including decisions and the delivery of services, but will be referred to as 'policy/practice' hereinafter.

### SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

#### New procedures for safe working in University buildings to control the risks from Covid-19

##### A. Policy/Practice (name or brief description):

Change in operations of the School of Economics buildings to accommodate social distancing requirements due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

##### B. Reason for Equality Impact Assessment (Mark **yes** against the applicable reason):

Proposed change to an existing policy/practice (changing the way the School operates its buildings and facilities to incorporate social distancing guidelines)

##### C. Person responsible for the policy area or practice:

Name: Professor Jozsef Sakovics

Job title: Head of School

School/service/unit: School of Economics

##### D. An Impact Assessment will be carried out if any if the following apply to the policy/practice, if it:

- affects primary or high level functions of the University -**YES**
- is relevant to the promotion of equality (in terms of the Public Sector Equality Duty 'needs' as set out in the Policy and Guidance)? - **YES**
- It is one which interested parties could reasonably expect the University to have carried out an EqIA? - **YES**

##### E. Equality Groups

To which equality groups is the policy/practice relevant and why? (add notes against the following applicable equality group/s)

- Age - YES
- Disability - YES
- race (including ethnicity and nationality) - YES
- religion or belief - YES
- sex - YES
- sexual orientation - YES
- gender reassignment - YES

- pregnancy and maternity - YES
- marriage or civil partnership<sup>1</sup> - NO

Clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable have been used throughout and are important. The NHS definition of these terms can be found on the NHS website.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>

- All managers will familiarise themselves with the meaning of these terms and the relationship to social distancing/shielding.
- Managers should find out, where staff are willing to share this, all staff that they manage that are in the clinically vulnerable categories for the purpose of effectively assessing social distancing risks. Personal health details will be kept confidential.
- Individuals classed as clinically extremely vulnerable will not be able to access the buildings and will be required to continue working from home.

## AGE

Age and Clinical Vulnerability – there is evidence that the susceptibility of individuals to Covid-19 increases with age. Robust, consistent operating procedures will reduce this risk and provide reassurance to this group.

*Mitigation:* Any older individual that is also in the clinically vulnerable category will have a personal risk assessment.

Age without Clinical Vulnerability – Restricted access to the building and use of rotas may occasionally require people to work longer hours on a particular day. This may be detrimental to some older individuals.

*Mitigation:* This will be mitigated through the communication of the clear expectation that staff and students are not compelled to work excessive hours during the day, and that lengthy operations tasks can, where possible, be shared between team members. Additionally, out of hours work will be voluntary for all individuals.

Travel to and from work using public transport may be more difficult and risky for older individuals.

*Mitigation:* Line managers are encouraged to take a flexible approach to arrival and leaving times to allow individuals to avoid peak public transport times. Extended opening hours may be adopted to reduce the use of public transport at peak times. The use of other methods of transport when possible will be encourage (eg. walking, cycling, private car).

## DISABILITY

Disability with Clinical Extreme Vulnerability – Individuals classed as clinically extremely vulnerable will not be able to access buildings and will be required to continue working from home.

*Mitigation:* Every effort will be made to ensure that the individual is not disadvantaged in their work. Where the extremely clinically vulnerable individual that also has a disability is a PGR student, consultation with the University's Disability Service should take place. Extensions to stipends and submission dates for PGR students may need to be sought.

Disability and Clinical Vulnerability – Risks to people that are clinically vulnerable and have a disability will be assessed on a case by case basis.

*Mitigation:* An individual risk assessment will be undertaken for clinically vulnerable people. The risk assessment will take into account their job; use of public transport; social-distancing guidance on minimising contact and maintaining a 2m distance; guidance from their GP. (Note: this process may change depending on guidance from the Scottish Government).

---

<sup>1</sup> Note: only the duty to eliminate discrimination applies to marriage and civil partnership. There is no need to have regard to advancing equality or opportunity or fostering good relations in this respect.

Those living with someone that is shielding (clinically extremely high risk) – though this person themselves does not need to shield, efforts will be made to ease the anxieties via conversations about any practical work adjustments that can be made (eg. Working in a room alone, etc.), wherever possible. The School of Economics will have robust communication plans in place to mitigate the impact of a potential split with some team members being on campus whilst others remain working from home/away from the main office.

The one-way circulation system implemented to maintain social distancing will create longer walking routes around the building. The building has no lifts, so we are not able to use a combination of lifts and stairs to get from one floor to another.

**Conditions requiring urgent access to toilet facilities** – for example, IBS, Crohn's disease, those experiencing severe menopause symptoms, etc. There will be fewer toilets available in order to ensure social distancing.

*Mitigation:* Individuals in this group will not need to abide by any one way system or queuing to access the toilets and may take the most direct route. Staff may not wish to (and are not obliged to) disclose this information to managers, but managers will make clear to all staff that this is a policy.

**Visual impairments** – approved signage in the buildings has been produced in consultation with the University's Disability Service and senior university management. The national body – Colour Blind Awareness – has reviewed the signage and approved the visual contract that addresses all combinations of colour blindness.

*Mitigation:* Those with visual impairments will be offered an individual risk assessment and a review of the Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PPEP).

#### RACE

Data are emerging that suggest BAME individuals can be more vulnerable to COVID-19, due to multiple factors, none, some or all of which may apply to any individual. The School will continue to monitor evidence in this regard and modify our assessments as information arises.

*Mitigation:* BAME individuals who are concerned they may be at increased risk can raise this with their line manager in the first instance. Line managers should engage with the individual, taking into account their particular circumstances.

#### RELIGION OR BELIEF

As there were no prayer facilities within the School of Economics this is limited, but access to University chaplaincy could be impacted. Should the University move to an extended teaching/working week to include Saturday's, this might impact some groups.

*Mitigation:* Any bookable room in the School can be booked for use as a faith space/observance.

#### SEX

Men – evidence exists that men, especially those in older age categories, are more vulnerable to COVID-19.

*Mitigation:* Men who are concerned that they may be at increased risk can raise this with their line manager in the first instance. Line managers should engage with the individual taking into account their particular circumstances, to improve risk while at the same time ensuring that individuals are not excluded from undertaking work that they are able and willing to do.

Women – more women occupy administrative roles that will be continuing to work from home over the longer term. This may disproportionately affect women in terms of isolation/mental health and in relation to home work in unsuitable work spaces. Managers should be open to

discussing concerns of women in relation to social distancing and returning, or not, to University buildings.

Carers – many individuals have taken on increased caring responsibilities during the COVID-19 period eg. Childcare, home schooling, elderly care.

There is evidence to show that during the Covid-19 pandemic, women in particular have taken on higher levels of caring responsibilities.

*Mitigation:* Line managers are required to take caring responsibilities into account when creating staff work plans.

### **SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

Some LGBT+ people may be hiding aspects of their lives from people they are living with, or be forced to shelter in situations where their identity is not fully accepted. The requirement to continue to work from home may cause disproportionate feelings of isolation and mental health and wellbeing problems for LBGT+ people.

*Mitigation:* LGBT+ individuals who are concerned that they may be at increased risk can raise this with their line manager in the first instance, though any line manager who they are comfortable with can be approached. Additionally, concerns can be raised confidentially with the School Equality and Diversity team (led by Professor Simon Clark).

### **GENDER REASSIGNMENT**

There is evidence that the lack of explicit gender-neutral facilities in higher education institutions causes indirect discrimination, and increases the risk of harassment for individuals who have undergone gender reassignment in addition to non-binary staff and students.

*Mitigation:* There will be fewer toilets available in total in order to ensure social distancing, but the same number of gender-neutral toilets will be available in unchanged locations. Individuals who are concerned about impacts to them arising from new social distancing plans that related to their gender reassignment can raise this with their line manager in the first instance.

### **PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY**

Pregnant women have been included in the list of people at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable) as a precaution. The School will comply with health and safety and absence leave requirements for pregnant workers and new mothers, regardless of how many weeks' gestation. The risk assessment will take into account: their job, any pre-existing health conditions; use of public transport; social-distancing guidance on minimising contact and maintaining a 2m distance.

### **OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ABOUT THE NEEDS OF RELEVANT EQUALITY GROUPS:**

The threat posed by COVID-19 is without recent precedent, with all areas of the University affected. The School Equality and Diversity lead is available to ensure that emerging information about protected groups is incorporated into School plans and is represented within the School Building Recover Team via consultation.

Information available through the UK government inquiry into the impacts of COVID-19 on people with protected characteristics has been consulted. The evidence for impacts on protected groups will change as new information becomes available. The School will keep up to date with information and incorporate new evidence of equality impacts as they arise. We will be monitoring particularly the UK government inquiry findings: "Unequal impact: Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the impact on people with protected characteristic" which will look especially at impact relating to gender, disability and BAME individuals.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/227/unequal-impact-coronavirus-covid19-and-the-impact-on-people-with-protected-characteristics>

- **Are there gaps in evidence/insufficient information to properly assess the policy, and how this will be addressed?**

The gaps in evidence for assessment of this policy will be filled by consulting continuously with protected characteristic groups as this practice is implemented and changed in response to the Scottish government guidelines.

- **Could application of this policy/practice lead to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, victimisation, less favourable treatment for particular equality groups?**

The implementation of this new practice has the potential on equality in a number of ways outlined in the document, and potential ways not identified, to impact directly on equality. These potential impacts are justified in achieving the aim of protecting staff and students from COVID-19. The indirect risk is mitigated by measures aimed at allowing individuals in one or various groups to take a more flexible approach to their work. In addition, we encourage any individuals who notice that their circumstances have deteriorated and who are not included here to reach out to their line manager, or any line manager with which they feel comfortable.

- **Will the policy/practice contribute to advancing equality of opportunity<sup>2</sup>?**

The new practice should enable researchers from all protected characteristic groups to resume research and other activities in support of research.

- **Is there an opportunity in applying this policy/practice to foster good relations?**

Applying this practice and ensuring its good communication will provide reassurance to all staff and students that their health, safety, and well-being are being prioritised, and that issues of equality have been carefully considered. Continued support for staff to work from home, and work flexibly can foster good relations with those for whom these flexible working practices allow them to maintain good work-life balance.

- **Will the policy/practice create any barriers for any other groups?**

No other protected groups will be affected, but there will be some inherent inequity imposed by the social distancing requirements and continuing to work from home. The School has engaged in a number of activities to support staff and students more broadly, informed by recent surveys. This includes adaptations to support the home-working environment, guidance to support health and well-being. We will continue to monitor the position and support our staff and students through a similar approach ongoing.

Finally a majority of students and members of staff will see the amount of at-home work to be increased well above pre-pandemic levels for the duration of the requirement of social distancing. While some individuals may find this advantageous, others will not. We will be allowing, once buildings are able to re-open, individuals to retrieve items from offices to ensure a more comfortable and safe home-working environment.

- **How will communication of the policy/practice be made accessible to all groups, if relevant?**

---

<sup>2</sup> Note: This question does not apply to the protected characteristics of marriage or civil partnership.

This policy will be available on the School share point site, with particularly important information communicated via email. Printed versions will also be available for those that require them.

The policy will be monitored continually after implementation and factors re-evaluated as governmental and University policy is revised over time. Policy modifications will be approved by the Building Manager (for local decisions), via DoPs/Head of School for building-wide modifications, or via Head of School for any change in policy affecting the entire School.

- **Is there potential or actual impact of applying the policy or practice, with regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and promote good relations?**

Applying this practice and ensuring its good communication will provide reassurance to all staff and students that their health, safety and well-being are being prioritised, and that all issues of equality have been carefully considered.

#### F. Equality Impact Assessment Outcome

Select one of the four options below to indicate how the development/review of the policy/practice will be progressed and state the rationale for the decision

**Option 1:** No change required – the assessment is that the policy/practice is/will be robust.

**Option 2:** Adjust the policy or practice – this involves taking steps to remove any barriers, to better advance equality and/or to foster good relations.

**Option 3:** Continue the policy or practice despite the potential for adverse impact, and which can be mitigated/or justified YES

**Option 4:** Stop the policy or practice as there are adverse effects cannot be prevented/mitigated/or justified.

#### G. Action and Monitoring

1. Specify the actions required for implementing findings of this EqIA and how the policy or practice will be monitored in relation to its equality impact (or note where this is specified above).

All line managers will be required to go through the EqIA with all members of their teams prior to the School reopening. During this time, it must be made clear to all members of teams that they should immediately contact their line manager should their circumstances change.

*Method:* This assessment will be sent to all staff/PGR students in the School by email, any responses will be evaluated and if required a review of the EqIA will take place.

2. When will the policy/practice next be reviewed?

The policy will initially be reviewed one month after implementation. After that the policy will be re-visited as anticipated changes in policies at the government or University level are implemented, or as and when feedback necessitates a review of the policy.

#### H. Publication of EqIA

Can this EqIA be published in full, now? Yes/No

If No – please specify when it may be published or indicate restrictions that apply:

Yes, due to the urgency of need, the EqIA will be published in its draft form as soon as possible in order to provide guidance in tandem with anticipated changes that will come from Government. Changes to the EqIA are expected as more information regarding impact and feedback is received and the School intends to act responsively.

**I. Sign-off**

EqIA undertaken by (name(s) and job title(s)):

Mrs Lorna Aitken (Finance and Resources Manager)

Mrs Janet Taylor (Director of Professional Services)

Professor Jozsef Sakovics (Head of School)

Professor Simon Clark (Equality and Diversity)

Accepted by (name): Professor Jozsef Sakovics (Head of School)

Date: (To be finalised and signed off 18/08/20; no material changes expected.

Retain a copy of this form for your own records and send a copy to [equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk](mailto:equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk)