



Equality Impact Assessment Template

Before carrying out EqIA, you should familiarise yourself with the University's EqIA Policy Statement and Guidance and Checklist Notes, and undertake our online training on Equality and Diversity and EqIA. These, along with further information and resources, are available at www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/equality-diversity/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.

A. Policy/Practice (name or brief description): **Biomedical Sciences Honours Project Portal**

This is an online portal used to support the allocation of research projects undertaken by senior honours students within the Biomedical Teaching Organisation in the Deanery of Biomedical Sciences, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine at the University of Edinburgh. This online portal replaces a previous online portal which has been decommissioned as the platform was no longer supported. The purpose of the online portal is to allow supervisors to submit details of honours research projects for students to choose from and then undertake during Semester 2 of their senior honours year. Projects are reviewed by Honours Programme Organisers to determine suitability for their discipline prior to the details being made available to students. Students see a list of approved projects for their programme and can contact supervisors to discuss the project prior to submitting their top five choices by a specified deadline. These discussions can take place in person, online, over email or by phone as suits both parties. Supervisors can choose to express an order preference for students who have ranked their project(s) to go forward into a matching algorithm (which is not influenced by artificial intelligence). Supervisors, who view the lists through the student record (which we call Euclid) can also specify any students who did not meet a defined match criteria (such as not communicating with the supervisor where contact was specified as a requirement prior to the ranking process). Once rankings are completed, an algorithm is used to match students to projects, giving a higher weighting to the student preference, and taking account of any match criteria. Students are also encouraged to find their own projects and these can be entered into the portal by the supervisor and reviewed by the Honours Programme Organiser prior to the allocation being confirmed. Where appropriate, Honours Programme Organisers will help facilitate an allocation for students with specific learning adjustments.

Supervisor and staff details can be entered by the individual or by the Portal administrator (upon request). Information held is: title, name, contact email, job type, username (UUN or email for non University supervisors) and employment affiliation. Fields can be edited by the individual or by the Portal Administrator. Information on protected characteristics is not requested. Student details are pulled from Euclid and the following fields are used: name, UUN, student email, year of study and Programme. Information on protected characteristics is not provided. The preferred forename field is what is visible to supervisors. Any changes to this information is made in Euclid and then feeds through to the online portal.

Unconscious bias training is provided by the university so users should not draw any conclusions from an individual's name/title. The algorithm is designed to identify student-project matches where both the student and project supervisor have identified each other as their first choice. These matches are allocated automatically. The remaining student-project matches are determined by calculating a score based on the student and supervisor preference (if any) and the algorithm is designed to allocate as many students to projects as

is possible. Students will not be allocated to a project that they have not ranked. Personal data (e.g. name) is not used in the algorithm and AI is not used at any stage in the allocation process.

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

- Proposed new policy/practice
- Proposed change to an existing policy/practice **Yes**
- Undertaking a review of an existing policy/practice
- Other (please state):

C. Person responsible for the policy area or practice:

Name: Philip Larkman

Job title: Director of Teaching

School/service/unit: Biomedical Sciences / Biomedical Teaching Organisation, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

D. An Impact Assessment should be carried out if any of 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 EqlA? **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
- Disability
- race (including ethnicity and nationality)
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- marriage or civil partnership¹

The Honours Project Portal has the potential to impact all senior honours students undertaking a degree within the Deanery of Biomedical Sciences; supervisors offering projects; and academic and professional services staff who support the project allocation process, and therefore may impact on all nine protected characteristics. In particular, we feel that the protected characteristics of disability and race are most likely to be impacted.

The protected characteristic of disability may be affected as this is an online system, and will need to be accessed through the use of an electronic device (either desktop, laptop, tablet or

¹ 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.

mobile). The system has been tested against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 AA standards and has a corresponding accessibility statement published in line with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. Reasonable adjustments will be in place should a disabled user prove unable to use the platform, and that we were unable to rectify. This could include provision of assistive software/hardware or where we were unable to rectify the issues submission of a project outwith the portal without any disadvantage.

In advance of each academic year, the portal is available for a number of weeks, first with summary information provided to students which will allow them time to familiarise themselves with the software and contact us if there are any issues which need to have adjustments made. The portal launches at the start of Semester when students can begin ranking projects and contacting supervisors. This period lasts for approximately 3 weeks.

Another significant consideration is race, whereby the portal is written in English, which is mitigated by the fact that the main teaching language of the University is also English. There is a potential positive effect in that by providing the facility online, users can access the information and subsequently use browser translation tools to convert to their preferred language. Honours Programme Organisers are required to review projects and mark as suitable for their discipline which provides an opportunity to catch and amend any details prior to sight by the students if appropriate. The majority of supervisors are University staff and there are a small number of known partners who also provide projects (usually NHS Clinicians or people from local research institutes). Projects must be submitted in English as this is the main teaching language of the University. Should users temporarily be in a location that blocks access to the online portal, alternative methods can be put in place to accommodate this such as providing the information by email for input by the Portal Administrator.

During the project allocation process, the online portal, as with the previous version, is available to users 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Supervisors have two months or more to enter project details which provides flexibility to accommodate a variety of working patterns, periods of leave and caring commitments. Staff can save projects before submitting to allow time to review and edit before marking the project as active, again this allows supervisors flexibility to fit around other commitments. This may have a positive impact on those with caring/parental responsibilities, some disabled users and users who observe times of specific religious observance. Once the portal has launched to students, edits can be made via the Portal Administrator. New supervisors are required to register with the portal and for University of Edinburgh Supervisors this is linked to EASE so that once access is approved, subsequent logins are via single sign on. Staff are required to input name, University User Name (UUN) or login name, title (selected from a menu which includes a "no title" option), job role, email and employment affiliation. All fields except UUN / Login can be amended by the staff member. Students do not need to register as they are added automatically via a Euclid feed so that only students on programmes using the portal will gain access. The student information provided is name, programme, email, year of programme and UUN. As noted above, unconscious bias training is available to all staff to ensure staff do not draw any conclusions from names.

The University vision is a continuing commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion for both students and staff. The University has a single [Equality Strategy](#) to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are guiding principles in our pursuit of academic excellence. If a student or staff member was found to have added discriminatory or offensive content to the portal then appropriate disciplinary action would be taken.

Add notes against the following applicable statements:

- On any available information about the needs of relevant equality groups:
 - Accessibility standards will be maintained by the Learning Teaching and Web (LTW) team and will meet with University policy and UK legislation ([Equality Act 2010](#); [Scottish Specific Duty Regulations 2012](#); and the [Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#)). We have completed manual testing with assistive software against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2. A and AA standards and a legally required accessibility statement has been published.
 - There will be ongoing consultation with the following groups: Biomedical Sciences Co-ordinator of Adjustments and Disability Learning and Support Service; student groups via ad hoc feedback or programme representatives; staff feedback via supervisors and Honours Programme Organisers.
- Any gaps in evidence/insufficient information to properly assess the policy, and how this be will be addressed:
 - We feel we have sufficient information at this stage to proceed but will continue to monitor feedback from students and staff users.
- If application of this policy/practice leads to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, victimisation, less favourable treatment for particular equality groups:
 - We do not believe that the use of the Honours Project Portal will result in any form of prohibited conduct for the reasons detailed above and below. Moreover, we will continually review the portal, whereby all feedback, positive or negative, related to any of the nine protected characteristics will be appraised and acted on accordingly. Should disabled users prove unable to access the portal, and we were also unable to rectify this issue, alternative methods would be put in place. This could include provision of the information in alternative formats, which would be free of charge to the user and given upon request. Disabled staff can be provided with assistive software and hardware to assist in using the portal as can students. If a disabled student was unable to complete the project in the portal for a reason related to their disability and we were unable to rectify this then it is possible for students to complete their projects out with the portal and experience no disadvantage.
- If the policy/practice contributes to advancing equality of opportunity²
 - The Honours Project Portal is available to senior honours students each academic year in the late summer to allow them to browse summary information on projects entered at an early stage. Supervisors also have a number of months to submit their project details and can edit these at various stages should it be needed. The portal is available 24 hours a day and support is currently provided during Monday-Friday, 9-5pm. This means students and staff can engage with the portal at times that suit their studies, work patterns or home life. Those who need assistance outside of office hours can email the Portal Administrator and will receive a response within office hours. While this means there will be a lag in response, deadlines are such that in most circumstances a short delay can be accommodated without having an impact on later stages in the process. Students can also arrange their own project (subject to the requirements of their Programme).
 - As a result, this flexibility in accessing the portal might help those who adhere to certain times of religious observance, in addition to the protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity, people who hold caring responsibilities, and disabled users. By examining the potential positive and negative impacts of all the protected characteristics, it is hoped that this demonstrates the University's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion,

² This question does not apply to the protected characteristic of marriage or civil partnership

specifically through enhancing equality of opportunity. We have completed manual testing with assistive software against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2. A and AA standards and a legally required accessibility statement has been published.

- If there is an opportunity in applying this policy/practice to foster good relations:
 - It is hoped that by considering impacts, positive and negative, on all the protected characteristics via the implementation of the portal, and subsequently this EqIA, we are showing that the University is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion. We have considered ways to mitigate and provide support and information to users in these groups.
- If the policy/practice create any barriers for any other groups?
 - We don't believe there are any barriers for the protected groups. As noted above, those who do not have access to their own computing devices can use those provided by the University which are available 24 hours and there is a laptop loan scheme which some students may be eligible for.
 - The portal is available as a website, allowing for ease of access in addition to availability and understanding for all users. Therefore, this has the potential to impact users with socioeconomic considerations and lower incomes, since this is predicated on accessing the internet via IT equipment (desktop, laptop, tablet and / or mobile device). However, all staff and students have free, 24 / 7 IT facilities at the University, principally at the George Square Main Library. IT facilities are also provided at other campuses across Edinburgh. Public libraries in the UK also facilitate free access to the internet. Finally, other countries have similar options available.
 - Students with specific disabilities requiring specialised arrangements for their projects can have a project arranged outside of the portal in consultation between the student, programme team, Co-ordinator of adjustments and potential supervisors. This has happened in the past when a student has required specific adjustments to support their learning.
- How the communication of the policy/practice is made accessible to all groups, if relevant?

Initial communication is sent to relevant users via email and guidance documentation is found on the portal itself. Guidance documents and portal generated emails adhere to the University guidance on creating accessible materials. Information is provided in alternative formats free of charge upon request
- How equality groups or communities are involved in the development, review and/or monitoring of the policy or practice?
 - Feedback will be gathered from students, staff and programme teams after the first use of the new portal and will influence future developments. Any issues or concerns raised regarding equality or protected characteristics will be prioritised in the development roadmap. The portal team is already responding to feedback from students and supervisors and working with the development team to address this feedback (where appropriate) on an ongoing basis. Where appropriate we will conduct with relevant equality groups to gain further information.
 - Feedback has been sought from the Edinburgh University Students Association, Disability Learning and Support Service and the Disabled Staff network.
- Any potential or actual impact of applying the policy or practice, with regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and promote good relations:
 - Nothing other than that stated above and below.

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.

For the reasons stated above and below.

~~**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**~~

~~**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).

The need for reasonable adjustments will continue to be monitored, as will the accessibility standards via the LTW team and the Deanery of Biomedical Sciences.

We will monitor all feedback for any comments, positive or negative, related to any of the nine protected characteristics and act accordingly. We will also advise staff of the need to make reasonable adjustments where appropriate, including providing information in alternative formats, free of charge, upon request.

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

The next review will be when a major change is made to the software or the practice of project allocations, in addition to receiving any feedback, positive or negative, related to any of the nine protected characteristics. On each of these occasions, the EqIA will be updated.

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:

I. Sign-off

EqIA undertaken by (name(s) and job title(s)): Tina Harvey, Student and Academic Services Manager, Biomedical Teaching Organisation, Edinburgh Medical School, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

Accepted by (name): Philip Larkman, Director of Teaching, Biomedical Teaching Organisation, Edinburgh Medical School, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

[This will normally be the person responsible for the policy/practice named above. If not, specify job-title/role.]

Date:05.12.24

Retain a copy of this form for your own records and send a copy to
equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk