



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):

Virtual Access Services, Centre for Research Collections

There are three new virtual access services planned at the Centre for Research Collections (CRC):

1. Hybrid / Virtual Seminars and Engagement: the delivery of teaching with special collections and museums objects through a Visualiser, using Blackboard Collaborate, Microsoft Teams and Zoom Enterprise. For online learning, this allows teaching staff to live stream (or pre-record) teaching with collections. For in person learning, the visualisers enable users to see details of collection items on large display screens.
2. Virtual Reading Room: the delivery of collections consultations using visualisers and delivered through Microsoft Teams and Zoom Enterprise. Users will be able to make a one hour appointment with a member of staff who will show the items through the visualisers.
3. Streamer for Sound Archives: online version of the sound archive streamer used at the School of Scottish Studies Archive. It allows users to make an appointment to listen to sound archives either remotely on their own device, or in the CRC Reading Room on a PC.

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

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

C. Person responsible for the policy area or practice:

Name: Francesca Baseby

Job title: Research Services Manager

School/service/unit: Heritage Collections (Access & Engagement), Library and University Collections, Information Services Group

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 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
- disability
- race (including ethnicity and nationality)
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- marriage or civil partnership¹

The service has the potential to affect all users, and therefore may impact on all nine protected characteristics.

However, the protected characteristic of disability may have the greatest impact, as this relates to accessing the services through the use of IT equipment (either desktop or mobile and via the internet). Information about the services will be hosted on the University website (EdWeb). EdWeb is governed by a Website Accessibility Policy, which is designed to be accessible as far as possible in line with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standard, including compatibility with assistive technology such as voice recognition software, screen readers or screen magnification software. Moreover, EdWeb holds an Accessibility Statement, as per The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. Virtual communication technologies, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Blackboard Collaborate, will all be used to access the services.

The visualisers have a high quality zooming function (Ability Net). Microsoft Teams is suitable for use with screen readers and is the primary way through which virtual reading room appointments will be delivered. Zoom also features accessibility function including screen reader integration and closed captions. However, the University is aware that these tools are not fully accessible and so reasonable adjustments will need to be in place should a disabled user be unable to use the system, and that we were unable to rectify.

The availability of the service in a virtual environment may positively impact several of the protected characteristics. In particular, pregnancy and maternity, disability, those with caring responsibilities (which could be disproportionately women) and those who observe and adhere to specific times of religious observance. The virtual nature of the service allows for flexible location / home access for those that may not be able to visit the CRC at the George Square Main Library.

Examples of this would include: It is recognised that caring responsibilities are disproportionately put on women and this can impact their ability to access services. Providing a broader range of methods to access services at the Centre for Research Collections has the potential to increase access for women (Carers UK).

The availability of online appointments may have some benefits for individuals with a neurodiverse condition. For example users with Autism and sensory differences may prefer to

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.

have an online consultation from their own home or office to avoid unnecessary travel in crowded situations (Ability Net).

Another significant consideration is race, whereby information about the collections, and items herein, will mainly be provided in English, which is mitigated by the fact that the main teaching language of the University is English. There is a potential positive effect in that by providing the service online, users can access the information and subsequently use browser translation tools to convert into their preferred language.

We have recently worked with [Empower Women for Change](#), a Glasgow-based NGO, and discussed the barriers for “diverse minority ethnic women” in accessing heritage collections. Barriers included:

- The University as a place that isn’t ‘for them’
- Discomfort at the level of surveillance in the Main Library and CRC
- Lack of awareness of the collections due to absence of appropriate publicity

The Virtual Seminar and Engagement service will support our ability to undertake outreach activities for community groups otherwise unable (or not comfortable) to visit the CRC at this time. The service also supports the CRC’s initiatives for Prescribe Culture and At Home with Heritage.

For international users the virtual access services will have a positive impact on the accessibility of collections, overcoming the barriers currently caused by the increased cost of international travel. However we also recognise that ethnic minority groups (or BAME) experience a greater level of economic deprivation within the UK, and this impacts access to reliable wifi connections and computing equipment (Centre for Social Justice). An in-person service may also be unsuitable due to travel costs. To mitigate this, University of Edinburgh students will be directed to the laptop loans service and have access to the University wifi. For non-University users, there is an option to use Zoom Enterprise rather than Teams as this software is available to use on older models of PCs and tablets. University staff and students have free 24/7 access to IT facilities

Any content added to service by all users (including staff and students) in the form of messages, files, meetings should not discriminate against any of the protected characteristics. Any content found to discriminate would result in disciplinary action. Within the University virtual communications services (including Zoom, Teams and Blackboard), a user may be identifiable to others, and therefore caution will be needed to ensure other users are not making judgments based on an individual’s name, particularly with regard to gender or race. Similarly, users may be able to upload a photograph to accompany their name in some of the technological formats, albeit it is optional. There should be no discrimination for users who do not wish a photograph to be used, including for religious reasons. Moreover, if a person is undergoing gender transformation, the system would pull the information from the Euclid student directory, meaning any changes would follow accordingly. In this instance and others, the user could upload whichever photo they wished and change it over time.

The University vision involves 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.

Add notes against the following applicable statements:

- On any available information about the needs of relevant equality groups:

We will monitor all feedback for any comments, positive or negative, related to any of the nine protected characteristics. Following an appointment, users are sent a feedback form that allows them to provide feedback for their service, including options to select satisfaction levels and free text boxes. This feedback is monitored by the Research Services Supervisor

and Research Services Manager. These services were originally conceived as a response to COVID-19 travel restrictions, however we recognised that they have the potential to increase accessibility of collections for those unable to travel to our physical service points. They have therefore been introduced as long term services.

- Any gaps in evidence/insufficient information to properly assess the practice/ policy, and how this be will be addressed:

At this stage, it is felt we have sufficient evidence to proceed.

- If application of this policy/practice leads to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, victimisation, less favourable treatment for particular equality groups:

We believe that the services will not lead to any prohibited conduct for the reasons detailed above and below. Should a disabled user prove unable to access the services through the aforementioned technology, and we were also unable to rectify this issue, reasonable adjustments would be put in place. This could include utilisation through assistive technology, or in provision of an alternative format. A review of these measures, alongside any feedback received, positive or negative, on all nine protected characteristics will be undertaken continuously.

We have added an additional section to our registration form that all users complete:

“Service users and staff are expected to behave with dignity and respect in line with the University’s Policy. The CRC is dedicated to providing a welcoming and supportive environment for all people, regardless of background or identity. As such, in person or during any online communications or consultations we do not tolerate behaviour that is disrespectful to our staff or learners or that excludes, intimidates, or causes discomfort to others.”

- If the policy/practice contributes to advancing equality of opportunity²

Addition virtual access services to the range of services at the CRC have the potential to advance equality of opportunity by increasing the methods of access to collections. Previously access was only granted in-person or through digitisation services that had a financial fee. Therefore, by utilising the various online communication platforms used by the University, users can access the collections, alongside meeting and communicating with other users and CRC staff from different locations as opposed to solely the George Square Main Library. This could advance equality of opportunity for people with parental and / or caring responsibilities, those who adhere to specific times of religious observance, as well as disabled users.

- 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 services, 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?

Users will require a means of accessing the services, including internet access. Staff and students have free, 24 / 7 IT facilities at the University, principally at the George Square Main Library, albeit this is where the CRC is also based. IT facilities are also provided at other campuses across Edinburgh. In the UK, libraries offer free internet access, whereas similar arrangements exist in other countries.

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

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

Services are listed on the University Library website, using EdWeb with accessibility compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA. Services are promoted directly to users through the enquiries service, where staff ask questions and recommend the service options that will suit their requirements. Our enquiries service is primarily through email using Unidesk Call Management System, however we also respond to enquiries by telephone and post.

- How equality groups or communities are involved in the development, review and/or monitoring of the policy or practice?

We carry out service testing using mystery shopper or customer journey mapping exercises – we recruit volunteers for the University of Edinburgh’s staff and student population to do these, and advertise all opportunities through the Student Disability Service (most recently October 2022). Volunteers receive Blackwell’s vouchers as a thank you.

- 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 detailed above.

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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 feedback will be monitored for any potential positive or negative impacts on any of the 9 protected characteristics.

Staff will be made aware of the need to make reasonable adjustments where necessary and the need to provide information in alternative formats upon request.

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

January 2024

H. Publication of EqIA

Can this EqIA be published in full, now? Yes

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)): Francesca Baseby, Research Services Manager

Accepted by (name): Jacky MacBeath, Head of Heritage Collections (Access & Engagement)

Date:

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