



## Equality Impact Assessment

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](http://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):**

Gather Town (PPLS) is a virtual meeting and collaboration tool intended for both social and teaching use. It is an alternative method for online interaction, allows participants to engage flexibly in group conversations, and enriches the learning environment.

Gather Town is primarily intended for internal use but could potentially be used for external purposes such as open days.

As a virtual meeting space, it shares some of the same equality considerations as other services, such as Collaborate, Teams meetings and Zoom.

**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: Martin Corley

Job title: Head of Psychology

School/service/unit: School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences (PPLS)

**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
- 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 **Yes**
- race (including ethnicity and nationality)
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- marriage or civil partnership<sup>1</sup>

The Gather Town service is an online virtual meeting service and has the potential to affect all staff and students.

The greatest impact from the implementation of Gather Town is likely to be felt by the disability group. Gather Town is an online service that needs to be accessible in line with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 AA standard, including being able to work with assistive technology including voice recognition software, screen readers or screen magnification software, auto-captioning, sign language assistance.

For users with visual and motor impairment, Gather Town has introduced a 'Follow' feature to allow motor impaired users and partially blind users to move around by following other users, and also introduced changes to comply to WCAG and AAA colour blind compliance.

For users with audio disability, for keynote speeches, interpreters can be spotlighted so that a sign-language interpreter shows up as the top left as a prioritized video. Users can click on the interpreter's individual video to full-screen the interpreter's video for more visibility. Gather have made the placement of an avatar on the video to facilitate seeing sign language.

Gather Town does not provide its own integrated live captioning, however captioning using a third-party captioning tool such as Webcaptioner (a free, online live captioning program: <https://webcaptioner.com/captioner>) is possible. We would make guidance available on how to do this.

Reasonable adjustments will need to be in place should a disabled user prove unable to use the system and we were unable to rectify it. Gather Town does not have a recording feature, but a screen capture software such as Kaltura may be used to record Gather Town sessions, which could prove useful to disabled users, including those with social anxiety.

The university has already provided guidance for recording online meetings, explaining that the responsible party must inform all participants of the intention to record beforehand, who they will be sharing this recording with, and allow participants to opt out of recording if they are uncomfortable.

Implementing Gather Town may positively impact several of the equality groups. Users who need a more flexible approach to studies will benefit from the availability of gather Town to have meetings from home. This could positively impact users with parental and caring responsibilities (people who need a more flexible way of working), some disabled users, and those who observe and adhere to specific times of religious observance, particularly if the sessions are recorded and made available for viewing when most convenient.

Gather Town requires users to use an avatar during their movements around the virtual room, offers to option to turn off your video when interacting with other users, which may have a positive impact on some equality groups, including users with social anxiety, who may prefer the anonymity it affords them.

Add notes against the following applicable statements:

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<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.

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

Users with a disability, users with hearing impairment, vision impairment or motor skills impairment, may encounter barriers to use of Gather Town as a learning technology, as is the case with similar virtual meetings tools. Gather Town must be as accessible for disabled users as possible, in adherence with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 AA standard. Gather Town have stated that they are always working on making gather more accessible as per their accessibility roadmap. And provide [recommendations for addressing accessibility needs with the current version of the service](#)

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

At this stage we feel 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 do not believe that the implementation of Gather will lead to any form of prohibited conduct. Where a user was unable to use Gather for any reason, we would put in place reasonable adjustments where possible to ensure no user was disadvantaged.

- If the policy/practice contributes to advancing equality of opportunity<sup>2</sup>

Gather could promote equality of opportunity, alongside the other online communication platforms used by the University, by allowing for users to access ways to meet and communicate with colleagues flexibly, in terms of location and time.

- If there is an opportunity in applying this policy/practice to foster good relations:

Gather has been introduced as in response to shortcomings perceived in the available virtual meeting services already offered at the University. None of the platforms can fulfil all user requirements, but gather is particularly useful for creating a virtual space that enables smaller manageable groups to interact while retaining contact with the larger group.

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

The implementation of Gather should not create barriers for other groups. There is a consideration that remote users in certain countries where virtual meeting services are unavailable may experience a barrier. We know that some service providers are unable to operate in specific countries due to U.S. legislation and sanctions, these include Cuba, Iran, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Sudan, and Syria due to US (United States) sanctions.

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

Guidance for using Gather will be available on the PPLS Learning Technology website. The webpages are created following the University Web Accessibility Policy (in accordance with level AA, 2.1 standard, of the W3C version of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).

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<sup>2</sup> This question does not apply to the protected characteristic of marriage or civil partnership

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

This hasn't happened yet.

- 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 to add to what has been noted above.

#### 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.

#### 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).

We'll monitor feedback on Gather within the school for any negative or positive impact, particularly with regard to any impact on the equality groups. In our user guides, we will remind users of the need to make reasonable adjustments where applicable and to provide information about Gather Town in alternative formats upon request.

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

The EqIA will be reviewed when there are any relevant changes to the service, or when we receive any feedback related to any of the equality groups.

#### 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: Bill Farquharson, Learning Technologist, PPLS

Accepted by:  
Martin Corley, Head of Psychology, PPLS.

Date: 20/04/2021

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