



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Equality Impact Assessment Template

If you require this template in an alternative format, such as large print or a coloured background please contact HRHelpline@ed.ac.uk.

You'll find it useful, before filling in this assessment template, to complete the online course:

[Introducing Equality Impact Assessment](#)

This template is designed to be used alongside the:

EqlA [Guidance and Checklist](#)

EqlA [Policy Statement](#)

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

A. Key Information	
Policy/practice name:	Community Access to Rooms
General background/aims of policy/practice:	Community Access to Rooms offers University rooms free of charge during evenings and weekends. The target audience of the scheme is small (income <£1 million) community organisations, with third sector/not-for-profit organisations being priority as collaboration with the third sector is key to successful delivery of the University's Community Plan. The scheme launched as a pilot in September 2022. It was adopted as business-as-usual following approval from University Executive in late 2023.
School/Dept:	Social Responsibility and Sustainability
Assessed by: (name & job title)	Sarah Anderson, Senior Community Engagement Manager
Sign off by: (name & job title)	Gemma Gourlay, Head of Social Impact
Sign off date:	8 th April 2025
Review date:	April 2030 This EQIA shall be reviewed every five years or when significant changes are required, whichever is sooner.

B. Reason for EqlA	(check one)
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New policy/ practice is proposed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change to existing policy/practice is proposed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other (describe in Section D below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

C. Who will most impacted by this proposal?

Consider carefully how your proposal will impact both positively and negatively on people from different groups.

Consider the 9 protected characteristics as below in your proposal. There may be other identity characteristics that you wish to also include in your impact assessment. It is expected that you will consider all equality groups for impact. Please indicate below (with a tick) which groups you feel will be most affected by your proposal.

Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Race (including ethnicity and nationality)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marriage and civil partnership¹	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Religion or belief (including no religion or belief)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Gender reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pregnancy and maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sexual orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other characteristics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

D. Consideration of Impact

Show your considerations of how all of the above protected characteristics may be impacted. The following prompts will help you to reflect:

- What information and evidence do I have about the needs of relevant equality groups – is this sufficient to fully assess impact?
- Could this policy/practice lead to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, victimisation, or create barriers or less favourable treatment for particular groups and how can you mitigate any negative impacts?
- Does this policy/practice contribute to advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations?

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

- How can communication of the policy/practice be made accessible to all relevant groups?

This is an updated Equalities Impact Assessment for Community Access to Rooms. It notes where recommendations from the October 2022 assessment have been acted upon. The October 2022 assessment was undertaken as the new practice was launched.

Age

Local third-sector organisations sometimes focus on support for specific age groups, common categories being children and young people or older people. 95% of the University's student population are aged 25 and under ([EDMARC student report 2019/20](#)). 2% of University staff are aged 66 & over and 3% are aged 16-24 ([EDMARC staff report 2019/20](#)). By contrast, for the general Scottish population, 16.8% were aged 65 & over and just over 35% were aged 29 and under in the [2011 Scottish Census](#). By default, we would expect to see the scheme benefit users according to Scottish Census proportions given that it is aimed at the wider general public, not just University staff and students.

Given the difference in age distribution between the University and general population, it is likely that University rooms were not designed with very young or old users in mind, yet these would be among possible scheme users. Except for University-owned nurseries, no University rooms have facilities especially for people under the age of 18. They are not required by the University's core business and there is no proportionate business justification for creating them for a 'meanwhile-use' scheme.

We know that people aged 60 and over report being less confident in basic digital skills (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-digital-strategy-evidence-discussion-paper/pages/5/>); this is relevant to how the scheme is advertised. Print postcard distribution via Edinburgh libraries has been undertaken to meet the needs of this audience. Phone calls are also possible, with a phone number advertised. While phone is popular, we have yet to encounter a potential user unable to access our web form to request space.

The prevalence of disability increases with age ([Scotland's Wellbeing: national outcomes for disabled people](#)). Older people are less likely to **feel** safe walking after dark; this is relevant to when rooms are available. As the scheme relies on 'meanwhile use' status, rooms are not available during the day during the week. This is something that cannot be changed as it relates to a basic premise of the scheme's operation.

The pilot scheme did not allow any room users under the age of 18, except for very young infants who need to be carried. This was due to concerns about managing safeguarding risk and previous incidents of problematic behaviour possibly due to insufficient adult supervision. This has now changed: we have been trialling permitting under-18s in rooms at Nucleus where appropriate risk assessment and safeguarding has taken place; this has been successful. This has been supported by the Events Manager for the College of Science and Engineering and will be temporarily supported by the Community Team when that post is vacant.

Rooms have been chosen that offer excellent physical accessibility. Rooms posing access challenges (e.g. flats on Buccleuch Place, which have good availability but do not have lifts) have been rejected for inclusion on this basis.

Disability

Local third-sector organisations sometimes focus on providing support for people with physical, intellectual or mental health disabilities and long-term conditions. Third-sector organisations are also likely to work with a disproportionate number of disabled people (versus incidence in the general population) because there is a long history of discrimination against disabled people. Certain disabilities are common among the University's student populations (those related to mental health, neurodiversity and specific learning differences such as dyslexia, [Disability & Learning Support Service Student Statistics 2020/21](#)) but others, such as mobility disabilities, are lower than the population average (based on 2011 Scottish census data). 3.1% of University staff have a disclosed disability ([EDMARC staff report 2019/20](#)); just under 30% of the local population averages in the Edinburgh City Region (Edinburgh, Lothians, Fife, Borders) population has a disability or long-term health condition (2011 Scottish census). We need, therefore, to consider a different variation of needs than if we were targeting the scheme to University staff and students.

Needs vary greatly by disability and can create specific requirements regarding the following non-exhaustive list of needs:

- Formatting and design of digital communications
- Communication format (e.g. print, digital, spoken word, in-person meetings)
- Adapted computing equipment (e.g. with specific programmes installed)
- Ease of readability of written language
- Assistance with building evacuation in case of an emergency
- Physically accessible meeting spaces (e.g. nearby parking, short walking distance, even walking surface, wide doorways, lift access to rooms not on the ground level)
- Dampening or advance warning of certain types of noise
- Provision or avoidance of certain types of lighting
- Simplified, clear and/or tonally 'relaxed' administrative processes
- Access to food and drink (people with type 1 diabetes may need to urgently treat hypoglycaemia; diabetes is classed as a disability under the 2010 Equality Act)

Accessible toilets are available in all buildings where the scheme runs (this is a criterion for including a building in the scheme), often on the same level as the room or else accessible by lift. There are Blue Badge parking spaces near some of the buildings, and we can offer parking in any space in the University car park immediately adjacent to 40 and 50 George Square for Blue Badge holders if arranged in advance.

The University currently has a Changing Places toilet in its Wellbeing Centre but the Centre is closed when access to rooms runs (the Centre closes at 5pm). There are plans for changing places toilets in other buildings on the central, King's Building and Lauriston campus. We will investigate whether any of these toilets can be made available to access to rooms users.

The previous prohibition by the University of food and drink in teaching rooms potentially disadvantaged room users with diabetes or otherwise needing to eat and drink regularly for health reasons (e.g. pregnancy). In 2024, the University's policy on this was changed. Room users can now bring food and drink with them and consume in rooms if they are left as they are found.

Race (including ethnicity and nationality)

Local third-sector organisations sometimes focus on supporting people of a particular race, ethnicity or nationality, again because certain racial and ethnic groups have been discriminated against over a long history. 11.9% of University staff ([EDMARC staff report 2019/20](#)) and 11.4% of University students ([EDMARC student report 2019/20](#)) belong to a BAME group compared to local population averages in the Edinburgh City Region

(Edinburgh, Lothians, Fife, Borders) that range from 1.8% to 8.2% depending on local authority (Scottish Census 2011). In this respect, we would expect the University to feel welcoming to people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

There have been incidents of racist abuse and attacks against people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the George Square vicinity in recent years affecting University staff, students and members of the public. Anecdotally, these seem to have targeted people appearing to be of Chinese origin and women wearing headscarves. The University takes such incidents seriously, working with relevant authorities. It is not possible to alter the location of the University campus and we know the central location is valued by many users.

We know that the impact Covid-19 has also led to greater anxiety among local young people from minority ethnic backgrounds ([Covid in Colour](#), Intercultural Youth Scotland). We know informally from the University's currently ongoing review of its historical links to African enslavement, colonialism and their racial legacies that the University's historic links to slavery, and the visibility of this in e.g. building names, means some Black people feel less welcome or safe on campus. The University's review and recommended action is expected to be published in 2025 and will hopefully improve the psychological safety of campus for people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

We know that Gypsy/Travellers are a particularly marginalised group in Scottish society ([Scottish Government analysis of the 2011 census](#)) and are more likely to have low literacy, poor health, disability, a lack of educational attainment, access to private transport or paid employment, and greater childcare responsibilities.

We know that between 0.9% and 1.9% of people in the Edinburgh City Region have little or no spoken English (2011 Scottish Census). Across all races, ethnicities and nationalities, adult literacy is likely still a challenge in Scotland, with a 2009 survey showing 3.6% of the adult population had serious literacy challenges and 26.7% had some ([Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies 2009: Report of Findings](#)).

Whether by reason of race/ethnicity/nationality and/or lack of access to appropriate education, anyone unable to read and write in English language will be unable to participate in this scheme as the room booker. It is not proportionate effort to proactively translate into any other languages given that the proportion of local people not literate in English is very small and the range of community languages is wide. People not literate in English will still benefit from the scheme as meeting attendees: our biggest room user is The Welcoming, who uses rooms for English classes for New Scots. For D/deaf users with some ability to read English, the Contact Scotland BSL atom is present on the 'Contact Us' button in the same zone as the scheme information webpages.

Public-facing material about the scheme was updated twice in 2024 to be clearer and more succinct. It was reviewed by communications colleagues who have recently received training in plain English.

Religion or belief

While we do not propose to open the scheme to any organisation whose sole charitable purpose is the promotion of religion (as such organisations are ineligible under our community grant scheme, from which we have extracted eligibility criteria), some third-sector organisations do have the promotion of religion as one of two or more charitable objectives and these organisations could conceivably be within scope. Particularly in the case of Islam, religion can interact with race and ethnicity.

Just over 7% of the University's staff population is Muslim or another non-Christian religion ([EDMARC staff report 2019/20](#)) compared to figures ranging from 0.9% to 4.7% in the Edinburgh City Region's local authorities. In this respect, we would expect the University to feel welcoming to Muslim people.

We know that some Muslim people, especially women who can often easily be identified by their style of clothing, could be the victims of Islamophobic abuse or attacks, and we are aware that such attacks have taken place in the wider George Square area of Edinburgh. As noted above, the University takes these incidents seriously and there are advantages to the centrally-located buildings that many users value.

We know that some Scottish Muslim women are culturally prohibited from mixing freely with men from beyond their immediate families. It will not be possible to ensure zero contact with male staff and students – buildings are open and used by others as part of the University's core business – but there is no need for close contact with male staff and students created by the scheme's operations.

Some religions may require space to pray at certain times of day, but this may not necessarily need to be a dedicated space. Buildings are usually quieter in evenings and it should be possible to readily find suitable space.

People who hold gender critical beliefs may feel unsafe due to events around the on-campus screening of the controversial film 'Adult Human Female'; we believe this risk is managed as the scheme requires room users to maintain a positive relationship with the University and generally operate 'in good faith' (in terms and conditions). Organisation missions and meeting purposes are also reviewed as part of routine due diligence on all bookings; this should prevent groups meeting in rooms for the purposes of disrupting or harming the University or its staff or students.

Sex

Some local third-sector organisations focus on people of a specific sex due to specific needs among both male and female sexes. 54.4% of the University's staff and 63.5% of students are of female gender ([EDMARC staff report 2019/20](#), [EDMARC student report 2019/20](#)) compared to a Scottish population average of 51.5% of people being of female sex in the 2011 Scottish Census.

Crime may be a relevant issue given that, during the winter, campus will be dark when rooms are in use. Men are much more likely than women to be victims of severe violent crime committed by a stranger, but men and women are equally likely to be victim of more minor violent crime ([Non-sexual violence in Scotland: report](#)). We know that women are less likely to **feel** safe walking alone after dark ([Scotland by numbers: A Picture of Crime – Using Statistics to Understand Crime in Scotland](#)). (Women are far more likely to suffer non-sexual violent crime, rape and sexual assault at the hands of a partner than a stranger. For men also, rape and sexual assault are far more likely to be committed by a partner than a stranger.) Rooms are only available during the evening during the week which cannot be changed as rooms are required for core University business during the day.

George Square is a relatively [high crime part of the city](#) and Holyrood Road has ongoing issues with antisocial and criminal behaviour involving people experiencing multiple hardships. Statistically, this poses greater physical risks to men. University Security is well-appraised of the issues and is working proactively with other agencies to improve the situation in the case of Holyrood Road. The working group is satisfied that current risk levels are acceptable. Servitor staff are always on duty when buildings are open and Security is contactable by phone on a number provided.

Sexual orientation

Some local third-sector organisations specifically target people of certain sexual orientation(s) due to the long history of discrimination against people belonging to LGBTQI+ groups in the UK and beyond. The 2022 Scottish Census reported that 4% of people aged 16 and over described their sexual orientation as “lesbian or gay”, “bisexual” or “other”. The University is committed to LGBT equality (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/inclusion/lgbt-equality>).

Urban areas, such as the location of the scheme, are felt to be more positive places for LGBTQI+ groups than rural ones ([LGBT Youth Scotland's 2022 report](#)), so these groups may perceive the University estate as being a relatively positive location. We believe the likelihood of people from these groups being treated negatively because of their sexual orientation while using our rooms is low.

We have identified that LGBTQI+ groups are under-represented in the community grants scheme (among applicants and recipients) to which the pilot of access to rooms was promoted. While it is possible that the needs of these groups are already well-met elsewhere, we have been doing outreach work to check that there are no barriers to these groups accessing the grant scheme and encourage participation from these groups. Likewise, through our equalities monitoring of access to rooms, we will monitor whether LGBTQI+ groups are also underrepresented in this scheme and if further outreach work is required to ensure that there are no barriers to these groups accessing the scheme.

Gender reassignment

Some local-third sector organisations specifically target people who have undergone or are considering gender reassignment due to the long history of discrimination against people belonging to LGBTQI+ groups in the UK and beyond. In the 2022 Scottish census, 0.44% of respondents described themselves as “trans” or having a “trans history”. Almost half of these identified as “non-binary”.

We know that anyone who identifies differently to the gender they were assigned at birth may have needs around the gendered labelling of facilities (e.g. toilets) to access them. The presence of gender neutral toilets has been verified in each building being used.

Trans people may have concerns about being the victims of verbal or physical aggression; this may be heightened at times when the University campus is relatively dark and quiet, which applies to most rooms available under the scheme in the Scottish winter. However, urban areas, such as the location of the scheme, are felt to be more positive places for LGBTQI+ groups than rural ones ([LGBT Youth Scotland's 2022 report](#)), so the urban location of the rooms available through the pilot may be relatively psychologically accessible. On balance, we so far feel the pilot is acceptable in this respect.

We know that some trans people, allies and organisations representing them participate in hostile trans-rights debates. We can speculate that they could feel unsafe in the vicinity of people who have been their opponents in these debates, e.g. women who are gender-critical feminists. The campus has been a location for screening of the controversial film ‘Adult Human Female’, although protest was permitted within certain parameters. As the scheme requires room users to maintain a positive relationship with the University and generally operate ‘in good faith’ (in terms and conditions), we believe this risk is managed. Organisation missions and meeting purposes are also reviewed as part of routine due diligence on all bookings. This should prevent groups meeting in rooms for the purposes of disrupting or harming the University or its staff or students.

Pregnancy and maternity

Some third-sector organisations target pregnant people and the parents of young babies to provide them with support. Some of the women these organisations support may have 'babes in arms', i.e. babies who are not mobile and require frequent milk feeds. This may mean these women need to bring a baby with them to a meeting in one of our rooms. Some women may prefer to retire to a separate room for feeding. At this point in time, for safety and liability reasons, under 18s are only permitted in Nucleus. There are no dedicated feeding rooms in Nucleus but, as for prayer, it is likely a quiet space could be found if needed due to lower building occupancy during the evening; the provision of dedicated feeding space is therefore likely disproportionate at this time. If safety and liability can be satisfied, we hope to expand under-18s to more buildings. As noted under 'Age', there is unlikely justification on the basis of this project to designate more feeding rooms across campus. Breastfeeding women also frequently report thirst and hunger triggered by a feed; food is now permitted in rooms. On balance, we feel the scheme justifiably proportionate with respect to infant feeding.

Similarly, most University buildings do not have dedicated feeding rooms for breast and bottle-fed babes-in-arms. They are not required by the University's core business and there is no proportionate business justification for creating them for a 'meanwhile-use' scheme. It is possible that buildings that do have them, such as Edinburgh Futures Institute, may join the pilot in future, offering some mitigation for 'babes-in-arms' scheme participants who do not wish to feed publicly.

Pregnant women and their foetuses are at additional risk from exposure to some substances, but the risk of this is low during the scheme (no rooms are being used which are also labs).

Exposure to some smells can exacerbate difficult symptoms like morning sickness. Catering is not being offered as part of the scheme and most University cafés are closed when the rooms are available.

Providing childcare to room users will be a disproportionate use of resources for a 'meanwhile use' scheme.

E. 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.	(check one)
Outcome 1: No change required – the assessment is that the policy/practice is/will be robust.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome 2: Adjust the policy or practice – this involves taking steps to remove any barriers, to better advance equality and/or to foster good relations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outcome 3: Continue the policy or practice despite the potential for adverse impact, and which can be justified.	<input type="checkbox"/>

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



F. Action and Monitoring

Describe any actions you will take to address the findings of this EqlA.

- How can I involve equality groups or communities in the ongoing monitoring, review and potential future development, of this policy/practice?

Describe how the policy/practice will be monitored going forward, to ensure that impact is frequently reviewed. Make sure you add a review date in Section A above.

In our most recent published Equalities Impact Assessment (October 2022) we said that we would do the following to monitor equalities of the community access to rooms scheme:

- Create a short room user feedback form that includes questions on equalities groups
 - The feedback form was shelved due to low completion rates. Significant work has been undertaken to improve the user journey for the scheme and build user resilience, and we are now planning to reintroduce a feedback form.
 - It was decided that it would be disproportionately invasive and burdensome to ask organisations to collect information about the protected characteristics of meeting participants. Instead, the feedback form will collect information about the missions of the organisations as these relate to protected characteristic groups.
- Monitor the stated missions of the organisation/group that use the scheme and identify any to which we can attribute specific protected characteristics.
 - Of the 141 organisations/groups that have used the scheme, 41 had identifiable missions relating to protected characteristic groups. These are detailed in the table below.
 - This data provides us with information about which groups are accessing the scheme, and with a bellwether of the kinds of organisations/groups that aren't accessing the scheme. However, we recognise that this data does not necessarily provide us with a clear and accurate picture and therefore we believe it would be better in future to ask organisations/groups to share this with us instead as part of the annual feedback form.

	People aged 19 and under	People aged 65 and over	People with caring responsibilities	Disabled people	People of Arab, Asian, Black or mixed ethnic background	People who identify as transgender or non-binary	Women	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, and/or queer people	Pregnant people, or those adopting a child	Do not have higher education qualifications
Number of organisations targeting a group	10	2	1	13	6	3	8	3	2	3

- Follow up with some room users specifically regarding how existing adjustments and mitigations have worked for them and their meeting attendees.

- This has taken place sporadically where we have communicated with organisations/groups on adjustments and mitigations they have required. However, we recognise that doesn't mean we are doing this effectively and creating a feedback survey will provide further opportunity to address this. A survey will provide insights if existing adjustments are working and if further adjustments/mitigations are required.

In response to our findings and learnings we will now launch a new anonymous feedback form for organisations/groups to complete. The feedback form will include a question on organisational mission for equalities monitoring. This will be sent annually to all organisations/groups and allow us to monitor equalities of the protected characteristics highlighted within this EQIA and consider any necessary adjustments.

In addition, we are currently creating a shorter feedback form for organisations/groups and room users to provide feedback on any issues that arise that they would like to raise as this should not have to wait until an annual feedback form is provided. Again, this will be monitored so we can consider any necessary adjustments.

G. Publish

Send your completed EqIA to the HR EDI team (equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk) to published, and keep a copy for your own records.